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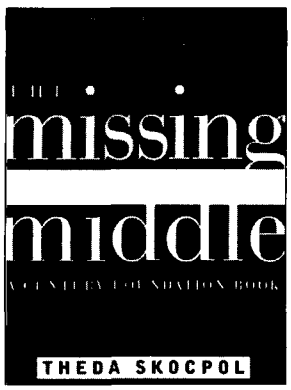

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— *PUBLISHERS WEEKLY*

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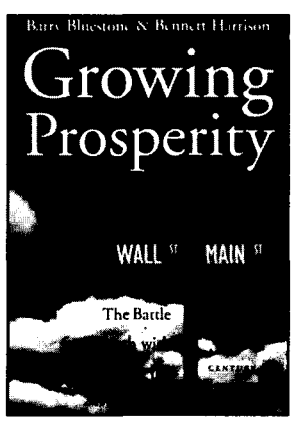

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— *PUBLISHERS WEEKLY*

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Letters

Exner Explained

Prof. Michael O'Brien is wrong ("The Exner File," December 1999). Judith Exner did not fabricate her claim of carrying cash from JFK to Sam Giancana. The Church Committee suspected she was a courier when it gingerly questioned her in 1975. She later confirmed it.

Exner says she met JFK at his home on April 6, 1960. Also present was "Bill," a railroad lobbyist. After dinner, they talked politics, then JFK asked her to carry a satchel of cash to Giancana. To O'Brien, this is "fantasy land." But the man Exner knew only as "Bill" was Bill Thompson, President of Florida East Coast Railroad, a close personal friend of JFK's but unknown to the public. Exner's travel records show she made the trip to see JFK and then went on to Chicago. Significance? The dinner occurred the day JFK learned he was losing the West Virginia primary. If Exner concocted this tale, she picked the right day to set events in motion. Giancana's assistance to the JFK campaign in West Virginia through his associate Skinny D'Amato is now well-known.

In *The Dark Side of Camelot*, Seymour Hersh confirmed Exner. He reported that Martin Underwood, a Mayor Daley operative loaned out to JFK, had told him that he went on the train to watch after her. Underwood later recanted in an unsworn statement to the Assassination Records Review Board. But his recantation is suspect. As a JFK advance man who had worked in Chicago and was close to Kennedy's right-hand man, Kenneth O'Donnell, he was ideally suited for the task. Fear that the ARRB might subpoena his records may explain his recantation. He had no reason to lie to Hersh.

Moreover, Johnny Grant, the honorary mayor of Hollywood, says that in 1963 Exner told him she carried cash from JFK to Giancana. Thus, her story is not a recent invention.

O'Brien says JFK had other aides who could have done her function "more safely and ably." Who? Were they available on short notice? Did they know Giancana? The job required loyalty, discretion, and anonymity. Clearly, Exner was loyal. She kept her silence about her affair with Kennedy for 12 years, breaking it only to confirm leaks from the Church Committee, and she kept more damning details silent much longer. Unlike his aides, she was publicly unconnected to Kennedy. And since they had recently met, she would recognize Giancana, and vice versa.

O'Brien speculates that FBI spies should have picked up any Exner-Giancana meetings. But it is now known that only in the summer of 1963, after Exner's role as a go-between had ended, was Giancana under a brief "lockstep" surveillance. As for the FBI's vaunted wiretaps, they picked up nothing about Giancana's plotting with the CIA to kill Castro.

In short, O'Brien relies on speculation and faulty analysis to discredit Exner, while her account is based on documentary evidence and the kind of inside knowledge which only one privy to the truth could possess.

JIM LESAR
ATTORNEY AT LAW
Washington, D.C.

Four Amigos

As a former West Virginian, I feel I can ask: Why were Buster Keaton, Peter Pan, Hank Stram and Norman Mailer caricatured on your January/February cover?

ALAN GIBSON
Jasper, Ga.

A For Aptitude

After having to sift through the crap the "media" normally spits out about the candidates and their campaigns, I was thrilled to come across the aptitude test ("Presidential Aptitude Test," January/February 2000). Though I sincerely wish my candidate scored higher in some areas, I can't deny that your reasons were on the mark, and the grades were fairly earned by all four. What an outstanding and objective piece of journalism.

Clear, concise and to the point, the aptitude test should be required reading before voters can enter the polls. I've sent the URL to everyone I know who is remotely interested in politics (frankly that's not a lot of people...)

Thanks!

GRAY COLDWELL
Oklahoma City, Okla.

I just wanted to thank you for writing an article that talks about the presidential candidates' stances on issues. I've watched TV, listened to radio, and read the newspaper, and had found next to nothing about what the candidates actually stood for.

I disagreed with Pomper & Thompson's positions on how the government should be run, and thus disagreed with their grading of the candidates. However, it was refreshing to at least have someone put something to writing that told us what the candidates believed and the actions they have taken.

BILL MCCLELLAN
Orangevale, Ca.

Thank you for an intelligent comparison of the major candidates on some key issues. I could care less about the clothes they wear and the food they eat; therefore, something substantive like your article is very much appreciated.

ROSS MCLEOD
Windham, N.H.

B For Bush

I just read your report card assessments of the four leading presidential candidates, Republican and Democrat (January/February 2000 issue).

With one of the assessments, I want to take strong issue.

You gave George W. Bush a B+ on education because "he helped push through a vouchers program, greatly increased Texas' state funding of public education, and expanded a testing and standards program." That is true, but you need to exam-

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ine not just the facts but the effects of GWB's efforts.

First, the vouchers have not proved effective in raising test scores and they have been quite disruptive where they have been used. Contact the Texas Freedom Network, a public schools coalition in Austin, for details.

Second, the "greatly expanded spending" has not materialized. While some extra dollars have gone to the schools, as they would have without GWB in a time of exceptional growth in state income, you should note that teacher salaries at the beginning of Bush's first term were 36th in the nation; at the beginning of his second term, 38th in the nation; when benefits are considered, Texas teacher salaries rank dead last. And the increases authorized by the last legislature were obliterated when local districts withdrew subsidies for teachers' health insurance.

Third, the expanded testing and standards program and the governor's "demanding" attitude only appears to have raised student scores. In fact, it has forced teachers in poor schools to "teach to the test" and has left more and more students so discouraged that the dropout rate—especially among minority children—has gone up alarmingly. Also, you should not take the apparent increase in student scores at face value. The numbers are skewed because many of the poorer school districts, individual schools, and individual students are simply not tested.

As for local control: Take a look at what is happening in the state's second largest school district, Dallas. The whites have fled and/or enrolled their children in private schools, the school board is corrupt and inept, and the new superintendent is overpaid and arrogant. (You can read all about it in the *Dallas Morning News* online.)

PHYLLIS GUEST
Dallas, Texas

L For Liberal

Why don't you just label your *Washington Monthly* as liberal-chic at the onset and save us the trouble of scrolling through the propaganda?

ERNEST TILLMAN
Corpus Christi, Texas

Help the Little Guy

I am not a farmer, but sympathize with the small farmer (and any small business). This country no longer follows any guidelines that made us great. The only guidelines are lobbyists that provide fuel and money for anybody's (not just companies') bottom line. All small businesses have been forced to quit. It's a shame and although I wouldn't live anywhere else, I am ashamed of our government and most politicians who are only interested in the big dollar, no matter whom they hurt (step on, squash, whatever you call it).

BILL POLUMBO
via email

On the Warpath

In his January/February review of Niall Ferguson's book on the origins of the First World War, *The Pity of War*, Andrew Cockburn seems to agree with or at least not disagree with some key claims about the war's causes and the reasons for British involvement. I wish Cockburn had made himself more clear about his own opinions and how he feels about Ferguson's.

The British Plan to send an army to France if that country went to war with Germany was a natural, reasonable result of a balance of power approach in a general sense and, more specifically, the result of a need to control the English Channel. I find it incredible that anyone could seriously wonder why Britain had an interest in the English Channel and the Channel Ports. Belgium had been created by British diplomacy and her neutrality guaranteed to insure that any hostile power—the British had France in mind at that time—would not control the Channel. Of course Britain went to war with Germany when Germany invaded Belgium. Britain could not ignore the threat of a hostile power controlling Belgium.

Would Britain have gone to war without a German invasion of Belgium? We can't know for sure. Perhaps other factors would have brought Britain in later. Nevertheless, it is quite inaccurate to picture British involvement as mainly the result of secret diplomacy unrelated to British national interests.

JOSEPH FORBES
Pittsburgh, Pa.

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Tilting at Windmills

BY CHARLES PETERS

Hillary's Pink Blouse • Alan's Threat To Albert • Greed on PBS
The Boomer Space Race • Wrong Man in Wrong Place II

HILLARY CLINTON'S "CAMPAIGN wardrobe is getting a little... repetitive" charged the March 6 issue of *Time*. It illustrates this grave accusation with pictures taken on seven different occasions, each showing the First Lady wearing a pink blouse and a brown jacket. Why should anyone care? The only people I can think of who would be interested are the same ones who criticized her for changing her hairstyle too often. And for them, one would think her fidelity to pink and brown would be reassuring.

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MY WIFE AND I HAVE A SMALL house. We have lived in it for 38 years and have grown too fond of it to leave even if we could afford to. But it is small and by now is crammed to the eaves with books and papers and the assortment of memorabilia and just plain junk that families accumulate over the years. So we understand the need for more space. But baby boomers have taken it to a new dimension. Consider one couple who are friends of ours. When they moved from the small apartment where they lived when we first knew them to a nice house twice the size of ours, we thought they had found a permanent home. But just a few years later, the husband told me they were moving. "Why?" I asked. "You have such a nice place now." His answer: "We need more space." The new house is 2 1/2 times the size of the house that was twice the size of ours.

It turns out that my friends aren't unusual. They're typical. "Like the American waistline, the new American home is getting larger," write *The Wall Street Journal*'s Carlos Tejada and Patrick Barta. "Empty nesters, baby boomers at the tops of their careers and the young and options-rich all are buying homes with more bedrooms, more bathrooms, and more flourishes than ever before. 'People want incredible amounts of space,' says Leslie Barry Davidson, a Houston architect. 'They come in and say, 'I want space for all my stuff, my clothes, my skis.'"

The flourishes usually include spacious, well-appointed kitchens. "Not that anyone cooks," one buyer told the *Journal*. "But it looks impressive."

On vouchers, it seems to me that both sides are wrong.

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"OH MY GOD. MY GOD. I HAVE no idea what you're talking about. I can't believe this." Thus spake Joseph Westphal, an assistant secretary of the Army, after *The Washington Post*'s Michael Grunwald informed him that the Corps of Engineers, which Westphal supposedly oversees, had been waging a behind-the-scenes campaign to increase the Corps' $4 billion civil works budget to $6.2 billion. This illustrates a couple of truths about the culture of bureaucracy that this magazine has long labored to bring to the public's attention. One is that the boss is often the last to know, which is why any boss should take great pains to find out what's going on below. The other is that anyone charged with overseeing a bureaucracy should know that its natural tendency is to increase its budget. A larger budget not only heightens the bureaucrat's sense of importance, it also decreases the likelihood of job loss and increases the possibility of promotion, not to mention more funding for travel, conferences, and other goodies dear to the bureaucratic heart.

When a misguided staff economist suggested that a proposed Corps project really was not needed, his supervisors immediately circulated a memo saying it was time to "get creative" with studies in order to "grow" and "not to take no for an answer."

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SO MANY CORPS PROjects have done more environmental harm than good and so many have proved to be costly boondoggles that it seems an unlikely candidate for a budget increase. But that does not mean that all agencies have enough funding. Some truly need more. An example is the National Transportation Safety Board, an agency with an impressive record of efficient and courageous fact-finding. A recent Rand study found that the NTSB staff is overworked. Average workload for the staff involved in the TWA 800 and ValuJet investigations was 62 hours a week. And the situation is likely to get worse. The number of transport aircraft is projected to double by 2017.

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BY THE WAY, IF YOU'RE IN the market for a new home, large or small, be warned that there's a new racket being practiced by the homebuilders. They will advertise the home as being built by a prominent company but the actual sales contract will be executed by an underfunded subsidiary. So if the house is a lemon and you sue, the underfunded subsidiary may not be able to compensate you.

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DID YOU KNOW THAT THE SAME FBI agent was the on-the-scene commander at both Ruby Ridge and Waco? His name, according to Terry Ganey and William Freivogel of *The*

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St. Louis Post Dispatch, is Richard Rogers. This has to be one of history's more spectacular examples of putting the wrong man in the wrong place, and, then after he has been proved to be the wrong man, putting him in the wrong place again.

Even more incredibly, Ganey and Freivogel report that Deputy Assistant FBI Director Danny Coulson wrote a memo warning about Rogers before the disaster at Waco. Opposing a request for permission to use gas to force the Branch Davidians out, Coulson argued that the plan was driven by the fatigue of the FBI team in Waco. "They are not only tired physically but tired of the situation and frustrated by the perceived lack of success." Coulson said that Rogers was "a significant part of the problem."

Then Coulson said, "We had similar problems in Idaho with him, and he argued and convinced [his superiors] that Randy Weaver would not come out. That proved to be wrong." But only after Rogers' misjudgment led to the killing of Weaver's wife and son.

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EARLY IN THE CAMPAIGN IT WAS revealed that John McCain had written a letter to the FCC on behalf of a contributor. The media—even the many reporters who liked McCain—treated this as "embarrassing disclosure" assuming it showed McCain had done something wrong. But it can be perfectly legitimate to write such a letter. It would be wrong if he did it because of the contributions. But it's possible that his contributor has a legitimate case that the legislator should help him make to the agency. It is also possible that the legislator is writing the letter just to get the contributor off his back and that the letter is so understood by the agency that gets it. This happens far more often than most people realize, but the press should be sophisticated enough to understand what's really going on. Unfortunately, it's a rare reporter who looks behind an apparent conflict of interest to see if it's real. After all, if it turned out not to be real, the story would be ruined, and who wants to ruin a good story?

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HAVING COMPLAINED ABOUT flowers that have lost their scent and tomatoes that have lost their taste, I'm happy to report that something is being done about at least one of these problems. Natalia Dudareva, an assistant professor in the Department of Horticulture at Purdue University, has launched a research project to determine why the scent of flowers has been lost and what needs to be done to restore it. Now will someone please volunteer to do the same for tomatoes.

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THERE IS A REBELLION GOING ON in California against the state's three-strikes law, reports *The Washington Post*'s Rene Sanchez. I hope it succeeds. The California law fails to adequately distinguish between violent and non-violent crime. Third-time felons must get 25 years to life even if their crimes are non-violent. Nearly 50,000 inmates are in California's prisons because of the statute.

Third-strike laws make sense for violent criminals. To protect society, you need to put those guys away for a long time. But for the non-violent, they just don't make sense. In Los Angeles, reports Sanchez, a homeless man who broke into a church in search of food received a third-strike sentence even though his last offense took place 10 years earlier.

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MAURINE NEUBERGER DECIDED not to run for reelection to the U.S. Senate in 1966 because of the amount of money she would have to raise. What was the amount she found too daunting? $250,000. That wouldn't finance a campaign for some state legislatures today. By 1984, a U.S. Senate candidate could spend $12 million. And imagine what Rudy Giuliani and Hillary Clinton are going to have to shell out in New York this year. That's why campaign finance reform is important and that's why I am sorry about the demise of John McCain's presidential effort. By publicizing campaign finance reform, he gave millions of people hope that the system could be changed and was attracting them to the voting booths in record numbers, reversing the decline in voter turnout that had been such a pronounced trend in the 1990s.

A *New York Times* profile by Nicholas Kristoff explains another reason I hated to see McCain lose. He was a proven leader. Kristoff says of the men who served under McCain in the Navy: "Loyalty to the Skipper was widespread. As one tracks down and talks to the men he once commanded, it is striking how often their voices light up as they describe something magical about the Skipper... he would hurtle into the maintenance shops and start kidding the officers, peppering them with rapid-fire questions and jokes, urging them, scolding them and leaving them fired up... Inertia had set in. But then McCain came in and changed them overnight."

So I regret his loss. Not that I don't share the conventional wisdom that he spent too much of the campaign's final days in overheated, overly-personal attacks, instead of focusing on the inspiring elements of his message. But I also feel that his mistakes were compounded by the media. Instead of seeing McCain whole, and consistently reporting his virtues and his faults, the media helped inflate his victory in New Hampshire by their too-enchanted reporting. Then, having become disenchanted, the media expressed that disenchantment disproportionately during the last week, and contributed to his defeat on Super Tuesday.

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MEDICAL ERRORS AND THE deaths they cause have been in the news recently. Behind the problem is the medical profession's longstanding lack of enthusiasm for self-criticism. The situation among lawyers is no different. For example, during 1998-9, the Wisconsin Board of Attorneys

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Professional Responsibility received 1256 complaints of which 1068 were dismissed without investigation. Only 34 of the complaints led to public reprimand or license suspension or revocation.

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A CANADIAN IS THE DEPUTY COMmander of the U.S. Army's Third Corps based at Fort Hood, Texas. This, having come about because of NATO, makes sense to me. In fact another form of the idea is one of the *Monthly*'s old causes. Since we haven't brought it up for a while, it may be time to tell our newer readers ab-out it. The State Department has embassies and consulates all over the world. So do countries like Great Britain, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand with whom we have a language and many other things in common. Why have duplicate embassies and consulates in the places where we have common interests with at least one of those nations? Why not let one of them represent us in some places while we represent them elsewhere. Of course we can't do this everywhere. Sometimes our interests diverge. But where they don't, we could save a pretty penny.

It is a rare reporter who looks behind a conflict of interest to see if it's real.

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"VOTERS IN THIS YEAR'S Republican presidential primaries rank education dead last in importance," writes Dave Boyer of *The Washington Times*, citing exit polls and other surveys of GOP voters. The same may be true of the political reporters for our great papers. Although I thought George W. Bush's best moment in the California debate was when he talked about his accountability education program, and the worst moment for McCain and Keyes came when they disagreed on the basis that any federal role in education is automatically bad. In their stories the next day neither *The Washington Post* nor *The New York Times* tried to explain Bush's position or the significance of his opponents' disagreement.

Even though we find Bush's ideas on education promising, his chances of enacting them with a Republican Congress in power seem less than promising in light of what the surveys—and indeed past performance in Congress—show to be his party's indifference to improving public schools.

One reason for the GOP's indifference to the public schools is that Republicans tend to be older and richer. Many of their children are grown or they can afford to send them to private school or they live in affluent suburbs where the public schools are not a problem.

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IF WACO SHOULD HAVE COME AS no surprise after Ruby Ridge with the same man in charge, then Fox's "Who Wants to Marry a Millionaire?" should have been entirely anticipated by anyone who knew the history of Richard Darnell, the show's creator. Not only had he been responsible for Fox's quiz show "Greed," he also had produced "Alien Autopsy: Fact or Fiction," "When Stunts Go Bad," and "World's Scariest Police Chases." One of his shows featured the surgical removal of a 303-pound tumor from a woman. He did decide against running a show called "The World's Most Embarrassing Throw-Up Moments." It was not that he found the concept distasteful. According to Alex Kuczynski and Bill Carter of *The New York Times*, "he decided against it because the vomiting segments were re-creations, not actual footage."

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THE EPA HAS PUBLISHED A NEW brochure entitled "Environmental Security—Strengthening National Security Through Environmental Protection." It revives one of the great Cold War bureaucratic tactics: Find some way to identify your program with national security! This ploy was enshrined long ago by the success of the "Defense Highway Act" in attracting generous appropriations.

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WILL ALAN GREENSPAN'S INTEREST rate hikes, by slowing the economy down too much, hurt Al Gore this fall? That is the question asked by David Ignatius in a recent column in *The Washington Post*. Ignatius says that Greenspan's latest increases "will really bite into the economy in September and October." If they do cause an economic slowdown, Gore will repeat the unhappy experience of another vice-president running for president. I seem to recall that Richard Nixon blamed his defeat in 1960 on the Fed's anti-growth policies that year and is said to have told Arthur Burns, the Fed chairman in 1972, to make damn sure he didn't repeat the 1960 mistake, advice that Burns heeded. On election day there was so little economic discontent among voters that Nixon won by a landslide.

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CREDIT CARD USE AMONG college students is getting out of hand, Joshua Wolf Shenk warned in an article in *U.S. News & World Report* a few years ago. Was he right? Consider this recent news from James Schembari's "Personal Business" column in *The New York Times*. Nellie Mae, a provider of student loans, finds that 35 percent of recent graduates who are repaying its student loans have other debts of more than $1,000—not per year, but per month!

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SOME GOOD NEWS. FLORIDA PUT $200 million from its tobacco suit settlement into an anti-smoking campaign that features tough television ads—one calls tobacco "the greatest killer of young people." The campaign resulted in a 20 percent drop in tobacco use among high

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school students and a whopping 54 percent drop among middle school students.

The bad news is two-fold. First, most other states are using less of the settlement money for anti-smoking efforts—the average is only seven percent. Second, in Florida, Governor Jeb Bush has slashed one-third of the funding for the program.

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WHAT ECONOMISTS USED TO worry about as inflationary were wage increases without comparable productivity increases. American productivity grew five percent in the second half of 1999. Wages grew at less than half that rate. Why doesn't Alan Greenspan attend to these statistics, instead of insisting that growth has to mean inflation?

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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL reports that the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission has not only (1) sued to overturn an Exxon policy, made after the Exxon Valdez accident, that bars anyone with alcohol or drug abuse from safety jobs but (2) also sued to prevent a railroad from relieving a train-dispatcher of his duties because he has a heart condition that can cause him to lose consciousness. The Commission is arguing that consciousness is "not itself a job function" and the employee's condition is not a "direct threat" to others.

This warped reasoning reminds me of the District of Columbia's Department of Motor Vehicles Director Sheryl Hobbs Newman, who defends her department's policy that counts safety violations against the truck company but not against the truck driver. Thus a driver can have an unlimited number of tickets and still keep his driver's license. Willis Curry still had a license—even though he had twice the number of violation points needed to revoke it—when his runaway rig ran a red light, flipped over, and killed a 17-year-old student. According to Ronald J. Hansen of *The Washington Times*, the four DMV employees responsible for Curry's license have been rewarded by Director Hobbs Newman with routine raises and one has even been promoted.

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IF FOX HAS TAKEN THE LEAD in encouraging money mania, the other networks are not far behind. As we have pointed out, even PBS has been featuring a show called "The Courage to be Rich." And as we were going to press with this issue the local public television station WETA was advertising: "Live from the WETA Studios: 'SMART WOMEN FINISH RICH.'"

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IF CONSERVATIVES, OTHER THAN George W. Bush, talk about education reform at all, it is usually to advocate vouchers. Liberals on the other hand tend to be automatically against vouchers. It seems to me that both sides are wrong. The reason is that vouchers can't be that big a factor. There simply aren't enough vacancies in the parochial schools, which are usually the only affordable institutions where the vouchers can be used. Catholic schools had more vacancies in the 1970s and '80s but the middle class has awakened to their value and has been snapping up the remaining slots so that there aren't a lot left for the poor. But where the vacancies still exist liberals—including Al Gore—are wrong to oppose vouchers that can permit the poor to escape from public schools when those schools are too abysmal to have any hope of giving the students a fair chance in life.

Early research on vouchers in the District of Columbia and in Milwaukee testify to their value. In the District, elementary school students who transferred to private schools were happier and did better in English and math than their former fellow students who remained in public schools. The Milwaukee study shows that vouchers encourage racial diversity rather than discouraging it as many liberals had feared. The percentage of minority students in private schools has grown from 22 to 35 percent.

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A CAUTION FROM THE DISTRICT study. Although the private school experience helped elementary students, those in grades 6-8 were more negative about their new schools and, while doing a little better in math, did worse in reading than those remaining in public school. Is it maybe that middle school is too late to make the change? You've got to get them at an early age, which by the way is also the message of Michael Eskenazi's article in this issue.

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JAY MATTHEWS OF THE WASH*ington Post* did the reporting I relied on for the District study. Jay is an unusual man. He is extremely well-connected, having worked on the *Harvard Crimson* during the same era as such luminaries as James Fallows, Michael Kinsley, David Ignatius, Frank Rich, Don Graham, and Robert Samuelson. Early in his career he was hired by one of the best papers, *The Washington Post*, and put on the fast track to conventional journalistic success. He, however, chose to get off the track and devote his career to covering education. I don't always agree with him, but he deserves the kind of special recognition we give to those who could succeed practically anywhere but choose to devote their lives to teaching in the public schools. In my religion, they are doing God's work.

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ANOTHER SUCH PERSON IS Barbara Busch, who recently retired after 35 years working in the federal government. Barbara began her career working for me at the Peace Corps. I was fortunate to have hired her. She was what we want every civil servant to be: intelligent, efficient, dedicated, and just plain nice. Barbara was attracted by the New Frontier-Early Great Society idealism that reigned in the Peace Corps back then. How many government agencies project this kind of appeal today?

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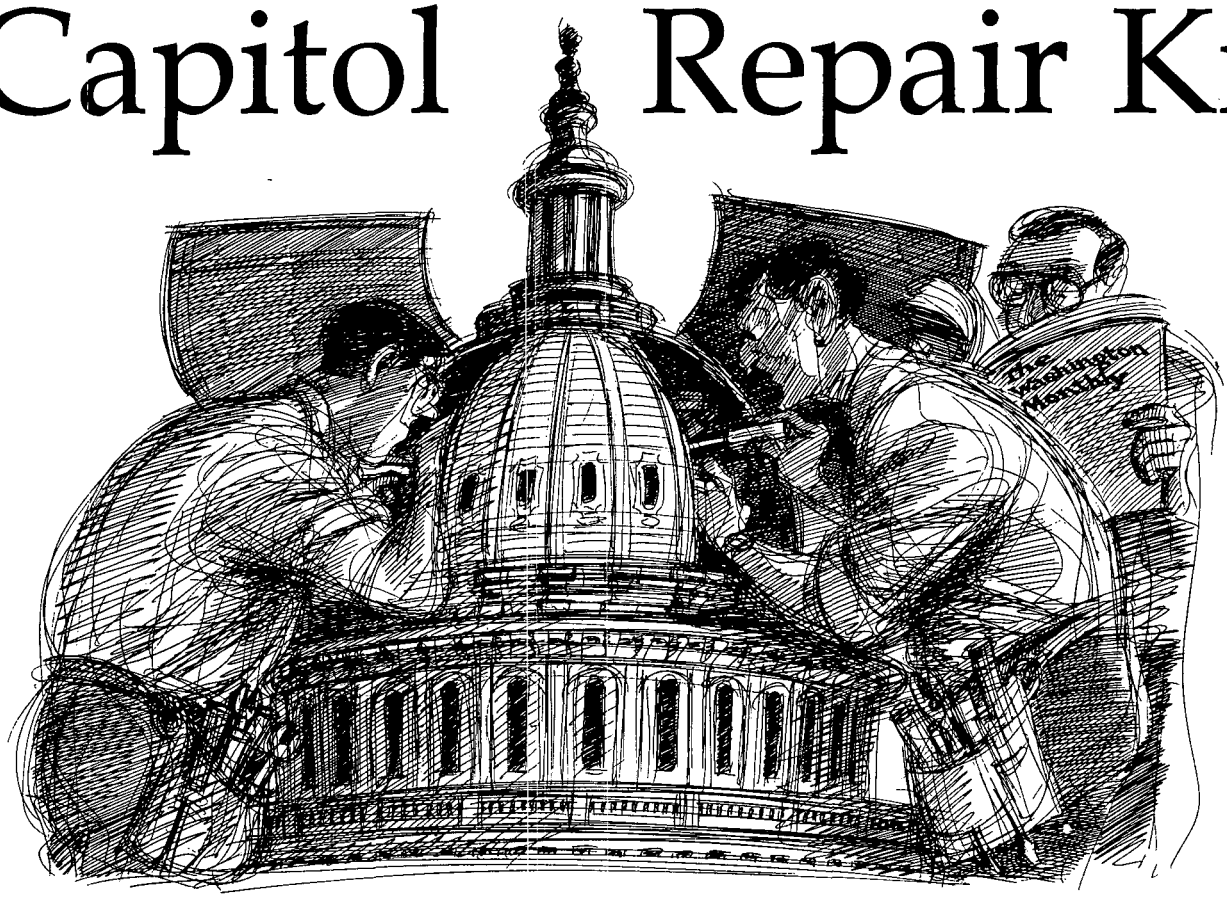

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Fighting Chance

Why we need enriching childcare to give our kids a fair start

By Michael Eskenazi

If you have ever wondered how important decent childcare is to poor families in the United States, consider the following two stories—one sad, one hopeful—from the beginning of the present school year:

Jewel Foster was a single mother in Chicago's South Side. She'd been scraping by without working for several years, but when her sixth child arrived and her boyfriend left her high and dry, she knew she'd need to make some extra money. She lined up a promising job—working as a cashier at Chicago's high-end Marshall Fields department store—and what's more managed to find a precious daycare spot for her baby at a soon-to-open center run by a local non-profit. She also enrolled in a course to get her high school equivalency diploma. But when Foster learned that the Center had to delay opening indefinitely, things quickly fell apart. She tried to line up another daycare center but had no luck—in part because there are only 900 subsidized daycare slots in all of Chicago. A social worker offered state-funded vouchers to pay for "informal" care—meaning too many loosely supervised kids crammed into a too small neighborhood apartment . "I didn't want that for my child," says Foster. She quit her job to care for her baby during the day and took a dead-end job packaging boxes at a shipping company at night, when a neighbor could look in on the kids. She also dropped her course.

In New York a happier story was unfolding. At the end of the first day of a federally funded "Head Start" pre-school program in Manhattan's P.S. 5, the teachers discussed a 3-year-old named Brenda Uraga. She was so outgoing, thoughtful, inquisitive—so *promising*—they couldn't help but pick her out of the crowd. Candida Uraga, Brenda's mother, smiled as she recalled that only a year ago Brenda had started out at a federally-funded "Early Head Start" program as a sheepish, disinterested toddler who didn't speak to anyone. Mrs. Uraga said that since then Early Head Start had "transformed" her relationship with Brenda and her other children. Following a year of working with the program's family workers, she has a more active role in the children's education, and says: "Now when my daughter wants to read a book, I take the time to read with her. I used to believe it made no difference."

And that, in a nutshell, is the tragedy of the American educational system: Despite all of our resources and all of the know-how we have about giving kids a leg up in life, we wind up helping only a handful of the children who need it. Perhaps we confuse ourselves with the bewildering range of labels that we use when we talk about the services that we provide or should be providing for the young: Head Start, Early Head Start, childcare, daycare, early childhood education, and so on. So let's be clear: What we need to emphasize, and what all of these programs need to focus on, is educational enrichment—an experience that blends seamlessly with the American educational process and will set the child up for a productive career in the public schools.

With 75 percent of American families now using daycare for their preschool-aged kids, there's certainly a critical mass of consumers for this sort of "quality" care. Yet studies have shown that only 25 percent of American daycare centers offer quality services—and those are the 25 percent most expensive. For the well-to-do, America offers state-of-the-art pre-school "campuses" like Denver's Creme de la Creme, which boasts 32-foot vaulted ceilings, a line of faux Victorian shopfronts, a mini-television station,

Michael Eskenazi *is a political writer for* Time Magazine Online.

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and all the other bells and whistles you'd expect for $14,000 per year. But even a family making $60,000 a year would have to stretch awfully hard to pay that kind of tuition. For kids from impoverished families—precisely the kids who need educationally-enriching daycare the most—it's simply not an option. For them, America's ad hoc and underfunded childcare system is a highstakes crap shoot. The lucky ones, like Brenda Uraga, hit big. But the rest are all too likely to get to kindergarten unprepared and unready to learn. These are the kids who will soon be tagged for dead-end special ed classes, waste their few years at school, and find themselves sunk right back into the poverty cycle when they graduate. Why can't we give them a ladder out?

Breaking the Poverty Cycle

Let's talk about that ladder for a moment. American meritocrats like to think of themselves as believing in equality of opportunity. But how can we kid ourselves that Americans have anything approaching equality of opportunity when we live in a country where children born into poverty have only the slimmest chances of reaching kindergarten ready to learn? If we can't address that problem, then isn't the meritocracy effectively hoarding the goods the education system has to offer for its own families? Consider the fact that in California, childcare subsidies can only be spent on daycare centers that fall at or below the 75th cost percentile—even though studies have demonstrated that you're only likely to get quality care *above* that percentile. That kind of policy signals only one message: We've climbed the ladder. Now let's pull it up before the next guy gets on.

If you think that's overstating the case, think about the impact that economic circumstances have on an American child's educational prospects. "Consider how typical middle-class families raise children" wrote education columnist Richard Rothstein in *The New York Times* last year. "Infants' first toys are 'touch and feel' books. Toddlers soon 'read' stories from memory. Magnetic letters decorate refrigerator doors. Sitting on parents' laps, children 'help compose' on computers before they can talk." Whether or not they happen to be enrolled at Creme de la Creme, these children are obviously being taught to appreciate what the education system has to offer.

Now, consider their counterparts in the housing project across the town. A recent study commissioned by the Children's Defense Fund showed that three-year-olds who grew up in welfare households knew fewer than half as many words as three year olds from professional families. By the time the kids were in first grade, it was only *one quarter* as many. Why? The CDF points out that low income kids are likely to come from homes with fewer than 10 children's books. They also get substantially less one-on-one reading than high income children. And Andy Seltzer, who administers the Head Start program where Brenda Uraga is enrolled, adds that: "In the community they come from there's very little language interaction between parents and children. Parents don't talk with their children. They just don't."

Could quality childcare close the gap between the middle class kid with magnets on the fridge and the welfare child whose vocabulary is falling behind by age 3? The evidence suggests that it could—or at least narrow it substantially. According to a mammoth 1997 study by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, quality childcare has an enormous impact in preparing children to enter the school system as stable and inquisitive students. In fact, the study went as far as to conclude that quality childcare can compensate for poor mothering in the early years (perhaps in part because quality childcare programs often have outreach programs that teach parenting skills).

Other studies indicate that the benefits of quality childcare follow a child right up to adulthood. A famous North Carolina study called the Abecedarian Project tracked two groups of low-income children—one that received quality daycare and one that did not—from preschool through age 21. It found that the quality-care kids were half as likely to end up in special ed, and twice as likely to attend four year college. And a recent federal demonstration program called "Follow Through" has shown that Head Start graduates who continue to receive support through third grade actually score on par with national averages on reading and math tests—discrediting some earlier studies claiming that Head Start benefits wear off by grade 3.

A Tangled Mess

Knowing all this, what exactly is America doing to give its children what they need for a fair start in life? Not much. You don't have to be an organizational genius to figure out that if you want to guarantee enriching childcare to all American children, then you can't do it on an ad hoc basis. But "ad hoc" is about the nicest term that you can assign American subsidized care. There is no central planning. Money flows downhill from the federal government to the states to the cities, pausing at each stop to molder in

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treasury accounts while the relevant legislature, or agency, or council scratches its head about how to spend it. And when they finally figure out how to do that, it's too often on a second or third-best alternative—licensing neighborhood homes to provide a minimal level of care, or sending out vouchers for "informal" care that may keep the kids alive but can't be counted on to provide much in the way of educational content.

First, let's consider how the system is supposed to work, if only in theory. The federal government's signature programs are Head Start (for ages 3 to 5) and Early Head Start (for ages 0 to 3). Both grew out of a Great Society initiative and both are supposed to provide subsidized preschool for all kids in families below the poverty line, which is $16,700 a year for a family of four. They do this by funding community centers that in turn provide services to eligible children.

But even in theory Head Start and Early Head Start can't meet all of the nation's childcare needs. Many Head Start programs are part time and closed during the summers (although Early Head Start runs all-day year-round). And they don't offer any assistance to the four-person family that has an income of $17,000 or even $35,000—which may be technically over the poverty line but will find that cold comfort when two $10,000 pre-school bills arrive in the mail. So to supplement the poverty level programs, the federal government provides the states an aggregate of $3.5 billion in matching funds under its Child Care Development Block Grant program. If fully used, the grants would cover about half of the kids whom the Department of Health and Human Services considers eligible for subsidized care based on family income. State and local governments are expected to pick up the shortfall out of their own budgets.

That's how it's supposed to work. Now, back to reality: In the first place, neither Head Start nor Early Head Start has ever been fully funded. The programs currently serve only 861,000 out of roughly 4.6 million eligible children. And despite widely noted improvements in the program's administration over the past few years, they still have some significant problems. One is that there is no standard national curriculum for either. Another is that program facilities only get inspected once every three years. In practice, this means that some facilities—like Brenda Uraga's—turn out to be winners, but that others can turn out to be real clunkers, with poor teaching and little federal oversight.

That said, Head Start is actually the bright spot in the system. The much bigger concern is what to do about the 4 million poverty level kids who can't get in the door of Head Start for lack of funding and the 5 million additional children whose families are over the poverty line but still eligible for subsidized care under HHS guidelines. The only way these kids can get subsidized care is through community programs funded by block grants, and state and local money. And this is where American childcare utterly breaks down.

One major problem is that the federal block grant program gives the states too much freedom. All a state has to do to participate is match a portion of the grant and then spend the proceeds on eligible kids. But once the money is spent, states are left to their own discretion about whether to dig in their own pockets for additional financing in order to get up to a particular level of coverage. As a result, states vary greatly in the level of coverage they provide. For example, Rhode Island—a generous state—guarantees subsidized care for all four-person families with income up to roughly $40,000 per year. By contrast, stingy Idaho cuts off benefits at $18,000 per year. And with regard to the quality of the care that federal money pays for, the states get to make the rules up themselves. In Massachusetts, childcare teachers have to be college graduates with special training in early childhood development. In Louisiana, they just have

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to be 18 and in good legal standing. In Maryland, you can't have more than six three-year-olds for each adult caregiver. In Texas, you can have up to 15 kids for each adult.

Another major problem is lack of coordination. As a result of this lack, states and communities that get their hands on childcare money often have no idea of how to spend it. In October 1999, for example, *The New York Times* reported that New York state had allocated $800 million for childcare—double the amount in its 1998 budget—and yet had no detailed plan for putting it to work for the low and moderate-income families it was supposed to help. This had nothing to do with a lack of need: The paper reported that a full 82 percent of families eligible for government subsidized childcare were not getting it. The money had simply landed in an administrative dead zone.

In the absence of a plan, what does a state do? Well, it can let the communities battle over who gets what. But this will often result in the better networked communities getting more, even if they don't need it. And of course there's no guaranteeing that the local officials who get the money will know how to spend it either. In October 1999, the *Times* ran a story that described how 37,000 low-income children had to go without any form of subsidized care in part because New York City could not figure out what to do with its $242 million state allocation. So while the children and their parents made do with whatever arrangements they could string together, the city puzzled over whether it should build new facilities, license neighborhood families to open daycare centers in their homes, or put out more vouchers to pay for "informal"—i.e., completely unregulated—care.

And this brings us to the most depressing part of the story. When all of the head-scratching and wheel-spinning is over, the cities too often fail to do the right thing and put their money into preschool programs like the ones that Brenda Uraga attended—programs that enrich, that make a difference, that give the kid a fighting chance of entering grade school with a will and a capacity to learn. Instead, they are prone to bet their money on doors two and three—family care and babysitting vouchers. In New York, for example, the Human Resources Administration (which administers childcare for welfare families) spent three quarters of its 1999 childcare budget on vouchers. And whereas the city used to make new facility construction the focus of its daycare investment strategy, the *Times* reported that the new "growth area" is in recruiting local families to hang out a shingle and start taking in kids.

That's a terrible result but you can understand how they got there. Even if the city wanted to open sparkling new community centers, where would they find the staff? It turns out that there's a national shortage of childcare workers. This relates to the fact that wages for center-based workers averaged out at $7.03 per hour in 1997 (the last time those data were crunched)—as compared, for example, to $8.08 per hour for a school cafeteria worker in Prince Georges County, Maryland. Add to that a tight labor market—national unemployment is hovering around a 30-year low—and it's hardly surprising that 1,000 Colorado providers went looking for greener pastures last year, or that Los Angeles recently projected a staff-driven shortfall of 150,000 daycare slots. You can also understand why the average tenure for an American childcare worker is less than three years—not exactly ideal if the goal is to develop a cadre of seasoned professionals in the field. The top-tier centers are somewhat isolated from this phenomenon because they can pluck promising graduates out of education masters programs.

But the worker shortage is only part of the picture. There's also a natural but unfortunate tendency for cities to see the childcare crisis as an opportunity to put unemployed residents to work as babysitters. Unfortunately, the idea's a proven loser as far as the kids are concerned. When Head Start was founded in the '60s, its architects thought they could use the program to fund neighborhood care, stimulate job growth, and foster a sense of community. But they eventually had to abandon the approach when it turned out that the neighborhood women (and it was mostly women who filled the daycare slots) just couldn't be counted on to do the educational job. Sure, there was a certain advantage in the fact that these women shared the kids' backgrounds and understood where they were coming from. But that was the downside too. The idea behind the program was to give the kids a leg up and out, a chance to break free from the cycle in which they and their parents had been trapped. But the neighborhood women were stuck in that cycle; they were part of it. And while there was always a chance that the program would light upon a caring person who through some miracle of ability and determination would also turn out to be the next Anne Sullivan, the odds were astronomically stacked against it. Faced with these facts, Head Start eventually abandoned the community-hiring approach.

You'd think that as a nation we'd have learned something from this experience, but that's the problem with a decentralized ad hoc system: If the federal government screws something up, the states and

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cities can simply ignore it. And in their current situations, where many cities are facing ever increasing demand as a result of welfare reform, and it's commonly perceived that there aren't any short-term alternatives other than to pour money into family-care and babysitting arrangements, the choice they'll make is pretty obvious. "We're told that more money is coming down because of the welfare to work reform," says Ronnie Fisher, assistant director of The University Settlement Society—a city-funded childcare center in Manhattan. "But instead of money coming down to expand licensed childcare, it goes to pay babysitters."

Six-year-olds from welfare homes knew only *one quarter* as many words as six-year-olds from professional families.

Solutions

There is a tiny bit of good news in national childcare: Because the state and federal government are not giving a lot of attention to creating a rational childcare system, a handful of non-profit groups and enlightened local officials have stepped up to the coordination challenge. Chicago's Ounce of Prevention Fund recently completed a 24,000-square-foot state-of-the-art center for children aged zero to three by tapping the Chicago Board of Education for land and money, Head Start and Early Head Start for additional funding, and the Chicago construction industry for in-kind donations. In New York, the Children's Aid Society built the school where Brenda Uraga goes to her Head Start classes with a land grant from the city, and a combination of federal, state, and local grants to provide comprehensive family services. And in San Francisco, the city government has developed a highly successful public-private childcare venture called "Starting Points."

But of course this is only good news if you happen to live in San Francisco, or you luck into something like a P.S. 5 or Ounce of Prevention slot. It's not going to do a lot to lift the prospects of the average poor kid living in, for example, Texas—where the level of childcare regulation scrapes the bottom of the national barrel, and where your interests are represented by politicians like House Majority Whip Tom Delay, who ranted last year that childcare (that's right, childcare—not the lack of it) was responsible for everything from gun violence to the degeneration of the family, and complained bitterly on the floor of Congress that: "We place our children in daycare centers where they learn their socialization skills under the law of the jungle."

If that's true (and given the lack of regulation, one can see why it would be in Texas) then it really is a national disaster. Enriching childcare is the last best chance that we have to give our neediest kids what the American privileged classes give their children as a birthright—equality of opportunity. It is the way out for them and for us as well—the means to throw a wrench into the poverty cycle and to reduce the flow of kids into special ed classes that soak up on the order of $35 billion a year of our public education money. And yet this potent combination of social justice and enlightened self interest has produced precious little in the way of productive political action. Why? Two hypotheses:

The first is the muffling power of class division when it comes to these issues. The influence classes simply don't have to confront this problem. They can pay their way into posh programs. And if your biggest childcare problem is deciding between fancy day schools like Spence and Brearley, you will probably never see the impact that inadequate care has on either lower income children or the nation's public schools. You probably won't read about it either, as the major papers' front page childcare stories tend to be on topics that give upper middle class couples something to talk about at cocktail hour but are of infinitesimal importance in the greater scheme of things—painful or pain-free childbirth, television or no television for little Amanda, family bed or no family bed? Often as not, the hard-hitting stuff (for example, the two *New York Times* stories referred to earlier in this article) appears further back in the paper—with other local news.

And that's the second point, which is that this issue has for all intents and purposes been captured by the devolutionary forces of American politics, who treat all matters relating to education as sacred states' rights turf. A number of people I spoke to in preparing this article told me that states would not under any circumstances permit federal control over, or even influence on, local childcare centers. But what about the rights of the children involved? It would be one thing for the states rights crowd to take this position if the states had a solid plan for dealing with America's childcare crisis. But it is unacceptable in

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light of what is actually happening out there. "Our children shouldn't be a political football," observes University of Chicago developmental researcher Delores Norton. "And that's what happens when the states have all the discretion."

The bottom line is that childcare is a national problem and somebody has to be held accountable. If the federal government is going to subsidize the states to handle it, then it has to hold the states accountable for meeting appropriate standards—from educational content, to health and safety regulation, to the amount of coverage that the states provide their children out of their own pockets. With regard to the latter, Rhode Island's example of providing guaranteed care up to 250 percent of the poverty line seems like one worth emulating, if we want to reach enough of the families and children who need assistance.

If the states fall down on this job, however, then the federal government is going to have to figure out another way to come at the problem. Most childcare advocates hope that they will do something along the lines of the Head Start program—i.e., working intensively with local communities to fund and oversee the creation of a national daycare system. This would require the federal

Who's Who

By Susan Threadgill

George W. Bush has been plowing new ground in English usage. To resolve disputes between patients and insurers, he has called for an "arbitrary panel." Describing the need for a strong defense, he replied, "there is madmen in the world and there are terror." On another occasion, he promised to "use our technology to enhance uncertainties abroad." When first asked by reporters why he hadn't denounced Bob Jones University's anti-Catholicism and its then-opposition to interracial dating, he said "I did denounce it... I denounced interracial dating." Bush then reached for a new height in linguistic creativity by saying "I denounced anti-Catholic bigacy." The governor had coined a totally new word—"bigacy," but then perhaps awed by what he had done, he retreated to the conventional and corrected himself to say "bigotry."

There has been considerable comment in the media about **Bill Clinton**'s loneliness since **Hillary** moved to New York. But she's been away from the White House before. In fact, not even counting all her domestic travel, she had by the end of last year taken 52 international trips according to **Paul Bedard** of *U.S. News & World Report*. Twenty-four of them, taking at least 121 days, were without her husband.

One reason that **Jamie Rubin** is leaving his job as State Department spokesman this month is that he wants to join his wife **Christiane Amanpour** in London. Another may be that, according to **Jane Perlez** of *The New York Times*, his boss **Madeline Albright** has lost the power struggle that secretaries of state traditionally have with national security advisors. Albright lost to **Sandy Berger**, not only because of the physical proximity to Bill Clinton that his West Wing office gives him, but because his personal relationship with the president is closer than Albright's.

When **George W. Bush** appeared on "Late Show with David Letterman," **Jennifer Harper** of the conservative *Washington Times* reported that "a grinning sure-footed Mr. Bush held his own with Mr. **Letterman** who told the governor he looked like 'a million dollars.'" *The New York Times* took a somewhat different tack. Its story, headlined "Bush Muffs Letterman's Late-Night Opportunity" and written by **Caryn James** said, "Imagine, then, what a comic flop he had to be to elicit groans and boos from the audience, as he did with jokes about Mr. Letterman's recent heart surgery." In case you missed it, here's what Bush said about the surgery: "I'm a uniter not a divider. That means when it comes time to sew up your chest cavity, we use stitches as opposed to opening it up."

As for the Democratic candidates, the columnist **Mary McGrory** says **Al Gore** tends "to lecture his audiences as if they were enrolled in an English-as-a-second-language class. He has the reflexes of a tin soldier—he turns his head carefully, and his arms seem to be taking signals from some other nerve center."

In a similar vein, comedian **Bill Maher** said that if the California debate between Gore and **Bill Bradley** had been on Fox, the title would have been "Who Wants to Marry a Monotone?"

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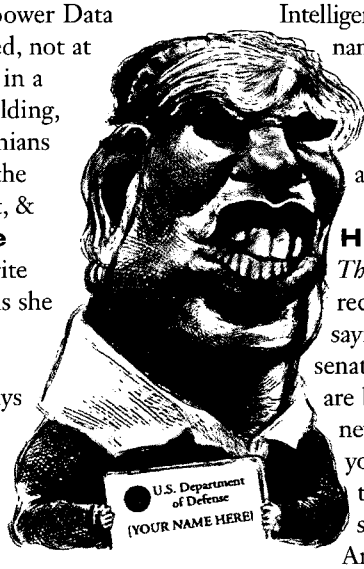
government to gather a database and start coming up with a firmer sense of what and where the nation's child-care needs lie. But if community partnerships leave some children unserved, then the feds may have to consider stepping in themselves. The states rights types will squawk, but let them. Washington has a long and honorable history of taking a firm hand when issues concerning core national values, social justice, and economic security are at stake. Think about Franklin Delano Roosevelt creating the WPA to put America back to work. Or the Kennedy and Johnson administrations ushering through the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

It won't be cheap. According to The Brookings Institution, it would cost in the neighborhood of $30 billion a year to make a high-quality two-year program available for every child in America coming from a family with less than $30,000 of income per year (which is somewhat lower than the cap proposed above). But surely a country that is thinking about repurchasing $2 trillion of debt to protect social security for its seniors can see its way toward buying a ladder up for the nation's children. They may not pack as much political weight as the seniors, but they are the nation's future, and they deserve a fighting chance.

If you've been wondering what **Linda Tripp** has been doing since her $26,000 facelift, nose job, chin implant, and neck fat removal, **Steve Vogel** has the—dare we use the word—skinny. She's a public affairs specialist at DMDC, which stands for Defense Manpower Data Center. It is located, not at the Pentagon, but in a Rosslyn office building, which Washingtonians will recognize as the home of Red, Hot, & Blue, the late **Lee Atwater**'s favorite restaurant. What is she doing to earn her $98,744 annual salary? She was, says her boss, the "primary person responsible" for mailing Department of Defense Military Funeral Honors kits to funeral directors, and is now developing a public affairs program for new Defense Department identification cards. And as any fool knows, nothing needs a public affairs program like an identification card does.



John M. Deutch, the former CIA director who seems to have confided too much to his computer, "was highly unpopular at the CIA" according to *The Washington Post*'s **Vernon Loeb**. He may be held in even lower regard on Capitol Hill. During a recent speech at the Smithsonian, **John Mills**, the chief of staff of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, was asked to name the worst CIA directors. He answered that Deutch takes "first, second, and third prize."

Helen Dewar of *The Washington Post* recently wrote a column saying that "moderate senators of both parties are beginning to show new signs of life." But if you looked closely at the story, only seven senators were named. And five of them are Democrats: **John Breaux**, **Evan Bayh**, **John Edwards**, **Blanche Lincoln**, and **Joseph Lieberman**. Only two, **George Voinovich** and **Olympia Snow**, are Republicans.

Georgette Mosbacher, the former wife of **Robert Mosbacher**, the Secretary of Commerce under **Daddy Bush**, complains that her husband has stopped payment on the $32,064 monthly alimony she is supposed to get. One reason, according to a Reuters report relayed by **Al Kamen**, is that she was backing **John McCain** instead of her ex's friend, **George W. Bush**.

Arnold Beichman, a Cold War scholar and columnist, says that of the top 24 office holders appointed by **Vladimir Putin**, the former KGB spy who is acting president of Russia, "10 have secret police backgrounds."

Slate's **Timothy Noah** picked up our January-February item about the Skull & Bones directive advising fellow members not to tattle on **George W. Bush**. Noah added something we hadn't known about Delta Kappa Epsilon, another fraternal organization to which W. belonged while at Yale. Dekes brand their members, a practice the *Yale Daily News* has described as "degrading, sadistic, and obscene." W. was president of the Dekes. But, Noah also tells us, W. only joined Skull & Bones instead of a "less elite (and from the sound of its name more party-hearty) secret society called 'Gin & Tonic'" because **Daddy** told him to.

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Untruth in Advertising

Why the press needs to take on Harry and Louise

By Howard Isenstein

POSITIONED NEXT TO A PHOTOGRAPH of a smiling elderly couple named Ann & Fred of Nokesville, Va., a senior named Flo explained her message in a full-paged ad in *The Washington Post* this January:

"Hi I'm Flo! I want to thank the thousands of seniors who have written urging Congress to help seniors in need get Rx drug coverage. Please keep urging your Member of Congress to join hands with Citizens for Better Medicare to support bipartisan plans for Rx coverage. It's the best way to ensure seniors get the medicine they need and still keep Medicare financially sound."

But Flo didn't pay for that ad, and neither did Ann and Fred. Citizens for Better Medicare, an organization funded almost entirely by drug companies deathly afraid of government controls, did. Yet you wouldn't know that from the ad or even the organization's Website. In fact, ads like this are beginning to reappear—just in time to misrepresent issues during the election cycle—and if the media does as bad a job deconstructing them as they did during the health-care debate of 1994, we won't be able to sort through their distortions, or even know who paid for them.

Interest groups have been running issue ads for years. When U.S. steelmakers found themselves under pressure from imports they ran ads claiming that foreign makers were unfairly dumping their products. When Congress took up the North American Free Trade Act, labor, business, and other interests tried to influence the debate through ads. But issue ads really came of age in 1994 when those who supported and opposed President Bill Clinton's health-care initiative spent over $100 million dollars, more than what Clinton and former President Bush spent combined in the 1992 election, says Kathleen Hall Jamieson, Dean of the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania.

The most prominent ads, featuring the famous "Harry and Louise"—sponsored by the Health Insurance Association of America (HIAA), a vehement opponent of Clinton's plan—consciously sought to disguise their big business backing by featuring actors posing as a middle-class couple in their home. In a series of print and TV ads, Harry and Louise voiced vague but powerful fears about the plan that ended up having an important influence on its eventual scuttling. With opponents of the plan outspending proponents by two to one, a study by the Kaiser Family Foundation, a nonprofit, independent health-care philanthropy, found that slightly over half of the lawmakers who responded said that interest-group advertising "had a great deal of impact on the [health-care] debate."

Mark Crispin Miller, a professor of communications at New York University, and issue ad watcher, emphatically agrees. "That campaign was really instrumental in shooting down Clinton's plan. The ads seemed to have come from the grassroots but were really bogus grassroots organizations."

While the Clinton health plan might never have flown, the ads prevented an honest debate. A study headed by Jamieson looked at 125 print and 73 broadcast ads on the health-care debate, run between January and October 1994, and found that they were "more often unfair than fair, more focused on fear than on fact and more often engaged in attack than advocacy." Indeed 28 percent of the print ads and 59 percent of the broadcast ads were deemed unfair, misleading, or false.

Even more appalling was the lack of a role that the media played. The study found that "reporters did a poor job of contextualizing ads, assessing their fairness and accuracy and identifying their sponsors." For example, most broadcast reports on the ads aired them with

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a full-screen, a move that "magnified their power and increased the likelihood that viewers would confuse them with news."

Sleeping Watchdogs

Issue ads surely have some place in a society that encourages the free exchange of political ideas. But they subvert the democratic process because, unlike ads by political candidates or commercials, it's not easy to figure out who is sponsoring the ads or what their motives are. Take the ads by Citizens for Better Medicare. Who would know from reading them or from any news report in the media that drug makers underwrite them? Who would know their motives? Who would know that, until this year, drug companies have worked ceaselessly to keep drugs from being covered under Medicare out of the fear that the government would then be able to dictate prices? Who would know that their plan seeks to derail the White House's plan to reform Medicare?

Examining the truth of issue ads and who's behind them is particularly timely and critical. Interest groups are poised to release a barrage of ads during the upcoming presidential election cycle and upcoming debates on Capitol Hill over the uninsured, patient rights, and drug coverage. On January 24, for example, a full page ad featuring Harry and Louise in their kitchen appeared in *The Wall Street Journal*:

"Look out Washington. It's been six years since we've heard from Harry and Louise, but they're back," the ad proudly proclaims. The ad, part of a $1 million campaign, touts the HIAA's plan to cover the country's 44 million uninsured—deftly calling the plan InsureUSA. But the plan isn't a real solution to solving the problems of the uninsured: it's just a way to impede the progress of major health-care reform proposals.

Or take the radio ads from the (possibly intentionally) obscure group calling itself Americans for Economic Growth. The organization, which has no Website and no phone number or address in the Washington, D.C. area as most advocacy groups do, sponsored radio ads in the districts of four vulnerable freshman House Democrats, accusing them of trying to steal Social Security funds to pay for government spending. The ads strongly resembled TV ads by the National Republican Campaign Committee, which targeted vulnerable Democrats in late September 1999.

Crispin Miller freely concedes that "propaganda *per se* is a fact of modern life and doesn't always require unmasking." But when such campaigns are well funded, "democracy is simply not viable if the masquerade (of who and what interests are behind the ads) goes undisturbed."

What's the solution? Miller says that news organizations simply have to do a better job than they did in 1994. That means consistently analyzing the ads for accuracy and finding out who is behind them. The media should not only make coverage of issue ads a regular part of their campaign analysis, as some outlets do with occasional ad watch columns for political candidates. Media organizations should also maintain areas on their Websites where visitors can look up ads, and the news organizations' corresponding analysis. Jamieson says that makers of issue and political ads and campaign strategists admitted to her, off the record, that ad watches have affected their behavior—at times making them tone down misrepresentations and sometimes making them pull ads altogether.

If journalists do their jobs better this time, it will be much easier for Americans to make headway in honestly solving some very serious issues. ●

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Memo of the Month

TRENT LOTT
MISSISSIPPI

United States Senate

OFFICE OF THE MAJORITY LEADER
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-7010

November 24, 1999

Mr. Judd Smith
1589 Campus Drive
Berkeley, California 94708

Dear Mr. Smith:

This is to acknowledge and thank you for your letter. I appreciate your bringing this matter to my attention.

I receive many requests for assistance due to my position as Senate Majority Leader. Unfortunately, due to the large volume of requests and limited staff available, I must limit such assistance to my constituents in Mississippi. It is a matter of protocol in the Senate that we defer such requests to the Senators from the person's home state. Therefore, because you are a resident of California, I believe this matter will be more appropriately addressed by your United States Senators. I would suggest that you contact the Honorable Dianne Feinstein and the Honorable Judd Smith.

Again, thank you for your letter. With kind regards and best wishes, I am

Sincerely yours,

Trent Lott

TL:lhc

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Pull The Plug

Why HMO reform can never really work

By Kip Sullivan

On Sunday morning, December 1, 1996, Joseph K., an 80-year-old Minneapolis man insured by an HMO named Medica, slipped on some ice while feeding birds in his yard and cracked a rib. He died Friday morning, December 6, from what the Hennepin County Examiner's Office described as "cardiopulmonary complications" of his fall. Although Joseph had been getting kidney dialysis for four years, he was a healthy man. He played golf regularly and drove himself anywhere he needed to go. According to two doctors who reviewed Joseph's medical file at my request, Joseph was probably killed by an undetected infection that got out of control.

Joseph's HMO doctors had plenty of time to diagnose him correctly. He was examined immediately after his fall in an emergency room, the fractured rib was detected, and Joseph was told to see his primary care doctor the next day, Monday. But on Monday, Joseph's regular doctor was not available. According to Joseph's records, the substitute doctor merely listened to Joseph's lungs to confirm that they were clear. Although Joseph complained about severe chest pain and weakness in his legs, the doctor did not, according to Joseph's medical records, take Joseph's temperature or his blood pressure. He sent Joseph home with the suggestion that he see his regular doctor "later in the week."

By the time Joseph saw his regular doctor on Thursday, he was in a wheelchair, had signs of a serious infection, and was deteriorating rapidly. He was hoarse, vomiting, suffering from terrible diarrhea that his wife had to clean up because he could not move unassisted, and had a temperature so high he refused to wear a coat in the dead of Minnesota winter on his trip to his doctor's office. Joseph's wife harbored the reasonable expectation that her husband would be hospitalized as soon as his doctor took one look at him.

That did not happen. Joseph was not even sent to a nursing home. Instead, his doctor sent Joseph home with the instructions (as his medical records put it) to "call or return to the office if not improving." When Barb Herold, Joseph's daughter, called her 81-year-old mother to find out how the appointment had gone, her mother was nearly beside herself at the seeming indifference of Joseph's doctors. Barb called Joseph's doctor immediately and asked why he had not been hospitalized. His answer was that Joseph might have "the flu" and just needed rest.

When Barb begged for nursing home care at a minimum, the doctor replied that he would authorize a "nurse evaluator" to go out to Joseph's house the next day, Friday. Why another professional had to make an additional evaluation when the doctor had just seen Joseph was not explained. Joseph died at 6:30 Friday morning, 14 hours after his doctor told Barb that Joseph had the flu. Medica never sent Barb or her mother an apology or an explanation. The Minnesota Department of Health, the agency responsible for regulating HMOs, claims to have investigated Medica in response to a complaint Barb filed with the Department, but refused to tell Barb what it found.

HMO Abuse

The abuse of Joseph K. is only one example of the widespread abuse of patients by HMOs that has generated what the media correctly calls an "HMO backlash." The extent of the abuse is difficult to determine, but there can be little doubt that it has worsened as enrollment in HMOs has risen. A July 1999 survey of physicians by the Kaiser Family Foundation and the Harvard School of Public Health found that 72 percent of physicians thought "HMOs and other managed care plans have... decreased...

Kip Sullivan *is a freelance health-care reporter whose articles have appeared in* The Washington Monthly, *the* New England Journal of Medicine, The New York Times, *and the* Los Angeles Times, *among others.*

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quality of health care for people who are sick." Protecting patients from HMO abuse exploded into a political issue in 1996. That year, a thousand pieces of legislation attempting to regulate or weaken HMOs were introduced in state legislatures.

Congressmen have responded to this backlash by debating "patient protection" legislation. On October 7, 1999, the U.S. House of Representatives voted by a surprising margin, 275-151, in favor of a patient protection bill sponsored by Rep. Charlie Norwood (R-Ga.) and Rep. John Dingell (D-Mich.). Supporters of the Norwood-Dingell bill, which must now be reconciled with a weaker Senate bill passed last summer, say it will empower patients and lead to improved quality of care. House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.) said the Norwood-Dingell bill would deliver "much-needed patient protections" and "return control of medical care back to where it belongs, to doctors and patients."

Comments like these create the impression that legislators can stop or substantially reduce HMO abuse of patients. That is simply wrong. Patient protection legislation will be as effective at ending HMO abuse as orders of protection and lawsuits against wife-beaters will be at ending domestic violence. All decent people should support an abused woman's right to a protective order and the right to sue. Similarly, decent people should support the Norwood-Dingell bill. But we should be under no illusion that patient protection legislation can end patient abuse by HMOs.

The truth is that as long as HMOs exist, patients will be abused. HMOs are under immense pressure to keep premiums down, and the only methods they have to do that cause rationing—denying necessary services or providing inferior services. The cost-control devices available to HMOs are utilization review (second-guessing of physicians' orders by HMO employees), rewarding physicians with financial incentives to deny care, and raising workloads on doctors, nurses and other providers. All three of these strategies can inflict harm—sometimes lethal harm—on patients.

According to HMO advocates, HMOs only cut back on unnecessary medical services. This is hokum. Utilization review, financial incentives, and overworked professionals are incapable of distinguishing necessary from unnecessary medical care with anything resembling precision. Using these HMO tools to eliminate unnecessary care is like using a lawnmower to weed a flower garden. Yes, the weeds get mowed down, but so do the flowers.

Nightsticks

Utilization review is a blunt instrument because reviewers never lay eyes on patients. Reviewers may learn a lot about patients by commandeering their files from their doctors and questioning the doctors over the phone, but it is impossible for absentee reviewers, even reviewers with M.D. and R.N. degrees, to outperform doctors who see and touch patients and who monitor and test them personally. Not surprisingly, the few studies available on utilization review indicate that it operates like a remote-controlled quota system. A 1996 study of a national HMO published in the *American Journal of Psychiatry* reported that psychiatrists who sought to hospitalize their patients asked for a median of 19 days in the hospital but utilization reviewers pre-approved a median of 6.9 days regardless of diagnosis. The authors concluded, "[U]tilization management appears to rely on standardized treatment protocols that do not include consideration of individual patient or clinical factors...."

Like utilization review, the typical financial incentive more closely resembles a nightstick than a scalpel. By definition, financial incentives pit physician self-interest against the welfare of the patient, and doctors, being human, too often cave in to self-interest. Financial incentives include explicit incentives spelled out in HMO contracts which enrich doctors when they deny care, as well as include the implicit threat that an HMO will refuse to renew the contract of physicians who order "too many" services. Financial incentives used by HMOs fall into three categories: (1) capitation (which means the payment is a set amount per enrolled patient per year that doesn't change regardless of how much care the patient needs); (2) bonuses given to doctors who keep referrals and other services down; and (3) firing doctors who insist on giving patients what they need (in the HMO business, this practice is called "deselection").

The third cost-control tactic—increasing the work loads of doctors, nurses and other providers—is the bluntest of the three HMO cost-control tools. HMOs raise workloads directly on the providers they employ, and indirectly on the providers who work in clinics and hospitals with which HMOs have contracts. If an HMO employs its own doctors, the HMO simply instructs its doctors to increase the number of patients they see per day. In 1994, Minnesota's largest HMO instructed its mental health providers to increase the number of patients they saw per week by 30 percent, an extraordinary

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increase in workload for an already overworked staff—and an increase that led to such a decrease in morale that, in one clinic I investigated, several members of the 18 member staff quit after the new requirements took effect.

Clinics and hospitals seeking contracts with HMOs have increased the workloads of their employees in order to keep their bids low and in order to finance the large increase in paperwork imposed by HMOs. The most visible and frightening consequence of this effort to please HMOs has been the reduction in nursing staffs. According to a 1996 study published in *Health Affairs*, U.S. hospitals cut their nursing staffs by seven percent between 1981 and 1993, and increased their administrative staff by 47 percent. According to a recent survey of registered nurses, the quality of care has been damaged by hospitals' efforts to contain costs, especially by cuts in medical staff. A hospitalized patient who, for example, develops an infection because the nurses on his floor were too busy to change his bandages is as much a victim of rationing as the patient who is told by his HMO that a referral ordered by his doctor has been vetoed.

By definition, financial incentives pit physician self-interest against the welfare of the patient.

Harsh Consequences

Among the provisions of the Norwood-Dingell bill, the most important ones require HMOs to reimburse providers who treat patients for conditions patients reasonably believed were emergencies; allow women to see ob-gyns without prior approval from their HMO; outlaw "gag clauses" (clauses in physician contracts with HMOs that prohibit physicians from discussing all treatment options with patients); allow patients to appeal denials of care to experts outside of the HMO; and permit patients to sue HMOs for malpractice. These provisions are directed primarily at utilization review and gatekeeping activities of *HMO employees*. Because these actions are relatively visible, they are also relatively easy to police and punish. But the Norwood-Dingell provisions do little to address the invisible rationing tactics that *doctors and nurses* are induced or forced to use in response to financial incentives and rising workloads.

Consider the case of Linda Harris. In March 1998, Linda developed an infection in the salivary duct in her right cheek that eventually caused excruciating pain, nausea, swelling of the right side of her head so severe she could not turn her head, her right ear was pinched shut, and her lower jaw was shoved leftward. During the three days before she was finally allowed to be hospitalized, she was unable to work and vomited periodically through a slit she managed, with great pain, to create between her teeth. When Linda was finally hospitalized, she required four days of intravenous antibiotics to overcome the infection.

In the month leading up to this nightmarish denouement, Linda had tried to get her ear-nose-and-throat doctor at Park Nicollet Clinic (Minnesota's second largest clinic after the Mayo Clinic) to "do something," as she put it—do a CAT scan, take a blood test, something to determine the nature of her infection. Under pressure from Linda, the doctor finally took a CAT scan, which suggested Linda's infection was caused by a stone in the salivary duct. But the ENT doctor refused to hospitalize her, claiming that was the responsibility of her primary care doctor. The combination of the ENT doctor's reluctance to take a CAT scan and his refusal to hospitalize extended Linda's hellish pain by perhaps a week.

No Day in Court

The Norwood-Dingell bill does little to address the less visible, more subtle forms of rationing visited upon Joseph and Linda. This is true even of the strongest (and the most controversial) form of patient protection in the bill—the right to sue HMOs for malpractice. It is very difficult today for the average patient injured by physician malpractice to bring lawsuits and prevail, and patients injured by HMOs—especially patients injured by the subtler forms of rationing induced by financial incentives and increased workloads—will find it very difficult to sue HMOs successfully, even if Norwood-Dingell becomes law.

When Joseph died of complications arising from his rib injury, his daughter Barb seriously consid-

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ered a malpractice suit against her father's doctor and HMO. But two obstacles barred her way. First, Minnesota has a law that prohibits patients from filing malpractice suits until they get a statement from a physician indicating the physician has read the patient's record and believes the patient has a legitimate claim. According to an attorney I spoke with, Barb's family would have to write him a check for $2,000 to cover the cost of getting a physician to examine Joseph's records, and the attorney said he could not guarantee that a physician would agree to write the requisite statement. Barb (who runs a small health-food store with her husband) and her widowed mother did not have $2,000 to gamble with. They declined to cough up the check.

Secondly, the attorney would not promise to sue, even if he got a physician to endorse the suit, because of Joseph's age. He said a large portion of the damages awarded to patients in negligence suits are damages for lost years of employment. He said he could not risk sinking $20,000 to $40,000 into developing Barb's case because the award would probably not cover his costs.

Attorneys were even less interested in suing for Linda than they were for Joseph. Two attorneys I spoke to agreed Linda had suffered outrageous pain, but, they said, she suffered no lasting harm, which means the damages would probably fail to cover court costs.

According to a study conducted by scholars at the Harvard Schools of Law, Government, Medicine, and Public Health, these examples of patients failing to sue for malpractice are the rule, not the exception. The study, published as a series of articles for the *New England Journal of Medicine*, concluded that only 2 percent of patients clearly harmed by physician error sue. To phrase it a little more dramatically, only one out of 50 patients who can clearly show that they were harmed by negligence ever bring their cases to court.

Big Steps Not Baby Steps

This isn't to say that the right to sue an HMO will be useless to all patients. Some patients who are not elderly or terminally ill, who suffer death or injury, not "mere" pain, and who can present compelling evidence that HMO employees were directly involved in the malfeasance that caused the injury or death, will benefit. Jimmy Adams, a seven-year-old boy who sat on the floor of the House of Representatives while Congressmen debated the Norwood-Dingell bill, is a good example of someone who will be helped by the right to sue HMOs. When Jimmy became very sick, his parents were told by his HMO (according to news accounts) that they had to drive to an approved emergency room on the other side of Atlanta. En route, they passed three hospitals, but, before they reached the approved emergency room, Jimmy's heart stopped. By the time he was treated, gangrene had set in, and Jimmy's legs and hands had to be amputated.

But for patients like Joseph K. and Linda Harris the right to sue, and the other rights proposed in the Norwood-Dingell bill, will mean little. If we want to protect all patients, we are going to have to do much more than sign a patients' bill of rights. We need fundamental reform of the health-care system. We must return HMOs to the margins of the system from whence they came.

But if we do not control medical costs by putting HMOs in charge of reducing the volume of medical services, how will we control costs? Answer: by putting the government in charge of controlling the price at which medical services are sold. America is the only industrialized country in the world that attempts to control health-care spending primarily by cutting back on the volume of medical services as opposed to the price of those services. The rest of the industrialized world, and traditional Medicare in this country, focuses primarily on price. Shifting from cost-control based on volume to cost-control based on price will require shifting to a single-payer system—a system in which one payer (the government) reimburses doctors and hospitals at rates set by society, not by doctors, hospitals or HMOs. Most importantly, because single-payers control price, they do not need to use the blunt instruments of managed care—utilization review, financial incentives, and huge workloads—to bludgeon down volume. They do not, in other words, have to interfere in the doctor-patient relationship.

The Norwood-Dingell bill contains some of the toughest patient protection language one can imagine. But the toughest patient protection bill imaginable will be insufficient to stop all or even most patient abuse at the hands of HMO bureaucrats and HMO providers. The incentives under the current system to commit or permit abuse are just too high, and the methods by which patients can be denied good care are just too numerous and subtle. Members of Congress who really want to "return control of medical care back to doctors and patients," as Rep. Gephardt says, should support legislation to create a single-payer system in America. ●

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He's No Pinocchio

How the press has exaggerated Al Gore's exaggerations

By Robert Parry

Al Gore may come across to many Americans as a smart guy with lots of experience and a clunky personal style. But the national news media have repeatedly portrayed the vice president in a much more sinister light: as a willful liar who may even live in a world of his own delusions.

This harsh assessment has been handed down across the media spectrum—from *The Washington Post* to *The Washington Times*, from *The New York Times* to the *New York Post*, from *NBC's* cable networks to the traveling press corps. Journalists and pundits freely denounce Gore as "a liar," "delusional," "Pinocchio," a "Zelig" character who inserts himself into improbable historical events.

Gore certainly has contributed to his own media problem with some imprecise phrasing and the kinds of exaggerations that all candidates make on the campaign trail. But journalists seem to have singled out Gore for extraordinary attention, with story after story reprising Gore's alleged pattern of deception.

But an examination of dozens of these articles, which purport to detail the chief cases of Gore's exaggerations and lies, finds journalists often engaging in their own exaggerations or even publishing outright falsehoods about Gore.

In December, for instance, the news media generated a small tidal wave of stories about Gore's supposed claim that he discovered the Love Canal toxic waste dump. "I was the one that started it all," he was quoted as saying. This "gaffe" then was used to recycle other situations in which Gore allegedly exaggerated his role or, as some writers put it, "lied."

But the Love Canal flap started when *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* misquoted Gore on a key point and cropped out the context of another sentence to give readers a false impression of what he meant. The error was then exploited by national Republicans and amplified endlessly by the rest of the news media, even after the *Post* and *Times* filed grudging corrections.

The Love Canal controversy began on Nov. 30 when Gore was speaking to a group of high school students in Concord, N.H. He was exhorting the students to reject cynicism and to recognize that individual citizens can effect important changes.

As an example, he cited a high school girl from Toone, Tenn., a town that had experienced problems with toxic waste. She brought the issue to the attention of Gore's congressional office in the late 1970s.

"I called for a congressional investigation and a hearing," Gore told the students. "I looked around the country for other sites like that. I found a little place in upstate New York called Love Canal. Had the first hearing on that issue, and Toone, Tennessee—that was the one that you didn't hear of. But that was the one that started it all."

After the hearings, Gore said, "We passed a major national law to clean up hazardous dump sites. And we had new efforts to stop the practices that ended up poisoning water around the country. We've still got work to do. But we made a huge difference. And it all happened because one high school student got involved."

The context of Gore's comment was clear. What sparked his interest in the toxic-waste issue was the situation in Toone—"that was the one that you didn't hear of. But that was the one that started it all."

After learning about the Toone situation, Gore looked for other examples and "found" a similar case at Love Canal. He was not claiming to have been the first one to discover Love Canal, which already had been evacuated. He simply needed other case studies for the hearings.

The next day, *The Washington Post* stripped Gore's comments of their context and gave them a negative twist. "Gore boasted about his efforts in Congress 20 years ago to publicize the dangers of toxic waste," the

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Robert Parry *is editor of the investigative magazine* American Dispatches. *He is also editor of a Website, Consortiumnews.com, where portions of this story first appeared.*

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Post reported. "'I found a little place in upstate New York called Love Canal,' he said, referring to the Niagara homes evacuated in August 1978 because of chemical contamination. 'I had the first hearing on this issue.'... Gore said his efforts made a lasting impact. 'I was the one that started it all,' he said." [*WP*, Dec. 1, 1999]

The New York Times ran a slightly less contentious story with the same false quote: "I was the one that started it all."

The Republican National Committee spotted Gore's alleged boast and was quick to fax around its own take. "Al Gore is simply unbelievable—in the most literal sense of that term," declared Republican National Committee Chairman Jim Nicholson. "It's a pattern of phoniness—and it would be funny if it weren't also a little scary."

The GOP release then doctored Gore's quote a bit more. After all, it would be grammatically incorrect to have said, "I was the one that started it all." So, the Republican handout fixed Gore's grammar to say, "I was the one *who* started it all."

In just one day, the key quote had transformed from "that was the one that started it all" to "I was the one that started it all" to "I was the one *who* started it all."

Spinning Out of Control

Instead of taking the offensive against these misquotes, Gore tried to head off the controversy by clarifying his meaning and apologizing if anyone got the wrong impression. But the fun was just beginning.

The national pundit shows quickly picked up the story of Gore's new exaggeration.

"Let's talk about the 'love' factor here," chortled Chris Matthews of *CNBC*'s "Hardball." "Here's the guy who said he was the character Ryan O'Neal was based on in *Love Story*.... It seems to me... he's now the guy who created the Love Canal [case]. I mean, isn't this getting ridiculous?... Isn't it getting to be delusionary?"

Matthews turned to his baffled guest, Lois Gibbs, the Love Canal resident who is widely credited with bringing the issue to public attention. She sounded confused about why Gore would claim credit for discovering Love Canal, but defended Gore's hard work on the issue.

"I actually think he's done a great job," Gibbs said. "I mean, he really did work, when nobody else was working, on trying to define what the hazards were in this country and how to clean it up and helping with the Superfund and other legislation." [*CNBC*'s "Hardball," Dec. 1, 1999]

The next morning, *Post* political writer Ceci Connolly highlighted Gore's boast and placed it in his alleged pattern of falsehoods. "Add Love Canal to the list of verbal missteps by Vice President Gore," she wrote. "The man who mistakenly claimed to have inspired the movie *Love Story* and to have invented the Internet says he didn't quite mean to say he discovered a toxic waste site." [*WP*, Dec. 2, 1999]

That night, *CNBC*'s "Hardball" returned to Gore's Love Canal quote by playing the actual clip but altering the context by starting Gore's comments with the words, "I found a little town..."

"It reminds me of Snoopy thinking he's the Red Baron," laughed Chris Matthews. "I mean how did he get this idea? Now you've seen Al Gore in action. I know you didn't know that he was the prototype for Ryan O'Neal's character in *Love Story* or that he invented the Internet. He now is the guy who discovered Love Canal."

Matthews compared the vice president to "Zelig," the Woody Allen character whose face appeared at an unlikely procession of historic events. "What is it, the Zelig guy who keeps saying, 'I was the main character in *Love Story*. I invented the Internet. I invented Love Canal."

Former Secretary of Labor Robert Reich, a Bill Bradley supporter, added, "I don't know why he feels that he has to exaggerate and make some of this stuff up."

The following day, Rupert Murdoch's *New York Post* elaborated on Gore's pathology of deception. "Again, Al Gore has told a whopper," the *Post* wrote. "Again, he's been caught red-handed and again, he has been left sputtering and apologizing. This time, he falsely took credit for breaking the Love Canal story.... Yep, another Al Gore bold-faced lie."

The editorial continued: "Al Gore appears to have as much difficulty telling the truth as his boss, Bill Clinton. But Gore's lies are not just false, they're outrageously, stupidly false. It's so easy to determine that he's lying, you have to wonder if he wants to be found out.

"Does he enjoy the embarrassment? Is he hell-bent on destroying his own campaign?... Of course, if Al Gore is determined to turn himself into a national laughingstock, who are we to stand in his way?"

On *ABC*'s "This Week" pundit show, there was head-shaking amazement about Gore's supposed Love Canal lie.

"Gore, again, revealed his Pinocchio problem," declared former Clinton adviser George Stephanopou-

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los. "Says he was the model for *Love Story*, created the Internet. And this time, he sort of discovered Love Canal."

A bemused Cokie Roberts chimed in, "Isn't he saying that he really discovered Love Canal when he had hearings on it after people had been evacuated?"

"Yeah," added Bill Kristol, editor of Murdoch's *Weekly Standard*. Kristol then read Gore's supposed quote: "I found a little place in upstate New York called Love Canal. I was the one that started it all." [*ABC*'s "This Week," Dec. 5, 1999]

The Love Canal controversy soon moved beyond the Washington-New York power axis.

On Dec. 6, *The Buffalo News* ran an editorial entitled, "Al Gore in Fantasyland," that echoed the words of RNC chief Nicholson. It stated, "Never mind that he didn't invent the Internet, serve as the model for *Love Story* or blow the whistle on Love Canal. All of this would be funny if it weren't so disturbing."

The next day, the right-wing *Washington Times* judged Gore crazy. "The real question is how to react to Mr. Gore's increasingly bizarre utterings," the *Times* wrote. "Webster's New World Dictionary defines 'delusional' thusly: 'The apparent perception, in a nervous or mental disorder, of some thing external that is actually not present... a belief in something that is contrary to fact or reality, resulting from deception, misconception, or a mental disorder.'"

The editorial denounced Gore as "a politician who not only manufactures gross, obvious lies about himself and his achievements but appears to actually believe these confabulations."

But *The Washington Times*' own credibility was shaky. For its editorial attack on Gore, the newspaper not only printed the bogus quote, "I was the one that started it all," but attributed the quote to *The Associated Press*, which had actually quoted Gore correctly, ("That was the one...").

Back in Concord

Yet, while the national media was excoriating Gore, the Concord students who were present for the original quote were learning more than they had expected about how media and politics work in modern America.

The students, along with a Website called *The Dasily Howler*, pressed for a correction from *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*. "The part that bugs me is the way they nit pick," said Tara Baker, a Concord High junior. "[But] they should at least get it right." [*AP*, Dec. 14, 1999]

When the David Letterman show made Love Canal the jumping off point for a joke list, "Top 10 Achievements Claimed by Al Gore," the students responded with a press release entitled "Top 10 Reasons Why Many Concord High Students Feel Betrayed by Some of the Media Coverage of Al Gore's Visit to Their School." [*Boston Globe*, Dec. 26, 1999]

Finally, on Dec. 7, a week after Gore's comment, the *Post* published a partial correction, tucked away as the last item in a corrections box. But the *Post* still misled readers about what Gore actually said. The *Post* correction read: "In fact, Gore said, 'That was the one that started it all,' referring to the congressional hearings on the subject that he called."

The revision again distorted Gore's clear intent by attaching "that" to the wrong antecedent. From the full quote, it's obvious the "that" refers to the Toone toxic waste case, not to Gore's hearings.

Three days later, *The New York Times* followed suit with a correction of its own, but again without fully explaining Gore's position. "They fixed how they misquoted him, but they didn't tell the whole story," commented Lindsey Roy, another Concord High junior.

While the students voiced disillusionment, the two reporters involved showed no remorse for their mistake. "I really do think that the whole thing has been blown out of proportion," said Katharine Seelye of the *Times*. "It was one word."

The *Post*'s Ceci Connolly even defended her inaccurate rendition of Gore's quote as something of a journalistic duty. "We have an obligation to our readers to alert them [that] this [Gore's false boasting] continues to be something of a habit," she said. [*AP*, Dec. 14, 1999]

The half-hearted corrections also did not stop newspapers around the country from continuing to use the bogus quote.

A Dec. 9 editorial in Pennsylvania's the *Lancaster New Era* even published the polished misquote that the Republican National Committee had stuck in a press release: "I was the one who started it all." The *New Era* then went on to psychoanalyze Gore. "Maybe the lying is a symptom of a more deeply-rooted problem: Al Gore doesn't know who he is," the editorial stated. "The vice president is a serial prevaricator."

In the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, writer Michael Ruby concluded that "the Gore of '99" was full of lies. He "suddenly discovers elastic properties in the truth," Ruby declared. "He invents the Internet, inspires the fictional hero of *Love Story*, blows the whistle on Love Canal. Except he didn't really do any of those things." [Dec. 12, 1999]

The National Journal's Stuart Taylor Jr. cited the

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Love Canal case as proof that President Clinton was a kind of political toxic waste contaminant. The problem was "the Clintonization of Al Gore, who increasingly apes his boss in fictionalizing his life story and mangling the truth for political gain. Gore—self-described inspiration for the novel *Love Story*, discoverer of Love Canal, co-creator of the Internet," Taylor wrote. [*National Journal*, Dec. 18, 1999]

On Dec. 19, GOP chairman Nicholson was back on the offensive. Far from apologizing for the RNC's misquote, Nicholson was reprising the allegations of Gore's falsehoods that had been repeated so often that they had taken on the color of truth: "Remember, too, that this is the same guy who says he invented the Internet, inspired *Love Story* and discovered Love Canal."

More than two weeks after the *Post* correction, the bogus quote was still spreading. *The Providence Journal* lashed out at Gore in an editorial that reminded readers that Gore had said about Love Canal, "I was the one that started it all." The editorial then turned to the bigger picture:

"This is the third time in the last few months that Mr. Gore has made a categorical assertion that is—well, untrue.... There is an audacity about Mr. Gore's howlers that is stunning.... Perhaps it is time to wonder what it is that impels Vice President Gore to make such preposterous claims, time and again." [*Providence Journal*, Dec. 23, 1999]

On New Year's Eve, a column in the *Washington Times* returned again to the theme of Gore's pathological lies.

Entitled "Liar, Liar; Gore's Pants on Fire," the column by Jackie Mason and Raoul Felder concluded that "when Al Gore lies, it's without any apparent reason. Mr. Gore had already established his credits on environmental issues, for better or worse, and had even been anointed 'Mr. Ozone.' So why did he have to tell students in Concord, New Hampshire, 'I found a little place in upstate New York called Love Canal. I had the first hearing on the issue. I was the one that started it all.'" [*WT*, Dec. 31, 1999]

The characterization of Gore as a clumsy liar continued into the new year. In *The Washington Times*, R. Emmett Tyrrell Jr. put Gore's falsehoods in the context of a sinister strategy:

"Deposit so many deceits and falsehoods on the public record that the public and the press simply lose interest in the truth. This, the Democrats thought, was the method behind Mr. Gore's many brilliantly conceived little lies. Except that Mr. Gore's lies are not brilliantly conceived. In fact, they are stupid. He gets caught every time... Just last month, Mr. Gore got caught claiming... to have been the whistle-blower for 'discovering Love Canal.'" [*WT*, Jan. 7, 2000]

It was unclear where Tyrrell got the quote, "discovering Love Canal," since not even the false quotes had put those words in Gore's mouth. But Tyrrell's description of what he perceived as Gore's strategy of flooding the public debate with "deceits and falsehoods" might fit better with what the news media and the Republicans had been doing to Gore.

An Old Story

Beyond Love Canal, the other prime examples of Gore's "lies"—inspiring the male lead in *Love Story* and working to create the Internet—also stemmed from a quarrelsome reading of his words, followed by exaggeration and ridicule rather than a fair assessment of how his comments and the truth matched up.

The earliest of these Gore "lies," dating back to 1997, was Gore's expressed belief that he and his wife Tipper had served as models for the lead characters in the sentimental bestseller and movie, *Love Story*.

When the author, Erich Segal, was asked about Gore's impression, he stated that the preppy hockey-playing male lead, Oliver Barrett IV, indeed was modeled after Gore and Gore's Harvard roommate, actor Tommy Lee Jones. But Segal said the female lead, Jenny, was not modeled after Tipper Gore. [*NYT*, Dec. 14, 1997]

Rather than treating this distinction as a minor point of legitimate confusion, the news media concluded that Gore had willfully lied. In doing so, however, the media repeatedly misstated the facts, insisting that Segal had denied that Gore was the model for the lead male character. In reality, Segal had confirmed that Gore was, at least partly, the inspiration for the character, Barrett.

Some journalists seemed to understand the nuance but still could not resist denigrating Gore's honesty.

For instance, in its attack on Gore over the Love Canal quote, the *Boston Herald* conceded that Gore "did provide material" for Segal's book, but the newspaper added that it was "for a minor character." [*Boston Herald*, Dec. 5, 1999] That, of course, was untrue, since the Barrett character was one of *Love Story*'s two principal characters.

The media's treatment of the Internet comment followed a similar course. Gore's statement may have been poorly phrased, but its intent was clear: He was trying to say that he worked in Congress to help develop the Internet. Gore wasn't claiming to have "invented" the Internet or to have been the "father of the Internet," as many journalists have asserted.

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Gore's actual comment, in an interview with *CNN*'s Wolf Blitzer that aired on March 9, 1999, was as follows: "During my service in the United States Congress, I took the initiative in creating the Internet."

Republicans quickly went to work on Gore's statement. In press releases, they noted that the precursor of the Internet, called ARPANET, existed in 1971, a half dozen years before Gore entered Congress. But ARPANET was a tiny networking of about 30 universities, a far cry from today's "information superhighway," ironically a phrase widely credited to Gore.

As the media clamor arose about Gore's supposed claim that he had invented the Internet, Gore's spokesman Chris Lehane tried to explain. He noted that Gore "was the leader in Congress on the connections between data transmission and computing power, what we call information technology. And those efforts helped to create the Internet that we know today." [*AP*, March 11, 1999]

There was no disputing Lehane's description of Gore's lead congressional role in developing today's Internet. But the media was off and running.

Routinely, the reporters lopped off the introductory clause "during my service in the United States Congress" or simply jumped to word substitutions, asserting that Gore claimed that he "invented" the Internet, which carried the notion of a hands-on computer engineer.

Whatever imprecision may have existed in Gore's original comment, it paled beside the distortions of what Gore clearly meant. While excoriating Gore's phrasing as an exaggeration, the media engaged in its own exaggeration.

Yet, faced with the national media putting a hostile cast on his Internet statement—that he was willfully lying—Gore chose again to express his regret at his choice of words. He has continued to do so in this year's televised Democratic debates.

Always Out of Context

On Feb. 17, *The New York Times* was back on the Gore-distortion beat with an article co-authored by Katharine Seelye and entitled "Questions Over Veracity Have Long Dogged Gore." The article asserted that some of Gore's distortions "are familiar and fairly trivial," such as "taking credit for inventing the Internet or being the model for Erich Segal's *Love Story*." But the piece argued that "concern about Mr. Gore's truthfulness dates back to the earliest days of his political career" and could reflect some "deeper problem."

In one example, the article alleged that Gore "overstated his one foray into real estate development to persuade groups of business executives that he was one of them. That claim led Arlie Schardt, who was Mr. Gore's communications director during the 1988 presidential campaign, to warn the candidate in a memo, 'your main pitfall is exaggeration.'"

What was especially strange about this anecdote, however, was that it clashed with Schardt's own recollection of the events, which he had detailed a day earlier—Feb. 16—on *The New York Times*' op-ed page. In his op-ed piece, Schardt stated that the "pitfall" memo "was not prompted by any groundswell of reports alleging that Mr. Gore was exaggerating his accomplishments. It was instead one of many memorandums routinely written to prepare the candidate for questions by reporters who I knew had a particular interest in uncovering some deception (a few openly resented the presumptuousness of a 39-year-old's running for president).

"One such reporter was digging into a comment Mr. Gore had made about having worked briefly as a home builder. My memorandum cautioned him not to exaggerate. 'Your main pitfall is exaggeration' was actually pre-emptive advice, not a response to something Mr. Gore had already said."

Nevertheless, on February 17, in the Gore "veracity" story, the *Times* dropped Schardt's explanation that the memo was "pre-emptive advice." The article then went further, implying that Schardt was confirming that Gore had exaggerated his real-estate experience. The article stated that Schardt said his "warning referred only to this specific claim regarding the real estate development." The phrasing left readers with the opposite impression of Schardt's position, as presented in the op-ed piece.

The Feb. 17 article did include one case of "gotcha" in which Gore was nailed for a real misstatement. The *Times* noted that Gore had claimed to be a "co-sponsor" of the McCain-Feingold campaign finance bill, when that was impossible because Gore was vice president when Feingold entered the Senate. In this case, Gore admitted "a mistake," with the explanation that he had co-sponsored numerous campaign reform bills while in Congress and had supported McCain-Feingold as vice president.

The Washington Times followed up *The New York Times*' article by again reprising the growing litany of Gore's supposed lies. "It may seem that Vice President Gore has taken the cue from his boss when it comes to finessing the truth," an editorial read. "However, the fact is that Mr. Gore was lying long before he ever teamed up with Bill Clinton."

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Though *The New York Times* had jettisoned the Love Canal canard, *The Washington Times* continued to misrepresent the key quote, although with a new twist. According to this version, Gore lied when he said it was he who "'had the first hearing on that issue... that started it all'." [*WT*, Feb. 29, 2000]

Reasons for this media contempt for Gore vary. Conservative outlets, such as *The Washington Times* and Murdoch's media empire, generally want to ensure the election of a Republican conservative to the White House. They are often eager to advance that cause.

In the mainstream press, many reporters may feel that savaging Gore protects them from the "liberal" label that can so damage a reporter's career. Others simply might be venting residual anger over President Clinton's survival of the Monica Lewinsky scandal. They might see Gore's political destruction as a fitting end to the Clinton administration.

Yet, the national media's prejudice against Gore—now including fabrication of damaging quotes and misrepresentation of his meanings—raises troubling questions about this year's election and how it will be covered:

How can voters have any hope of expressing an informed judgment when the media intervenes to transform one of the principal candidates—an individual who, by all accounts, is a well-qualified public official and a decent family man—into a national laughingstock?

What hope does a candidate have when the media can misrepresent his words so thoroughly that they become an argument for his mental instability—and all the candidate feels he can do about the misquotes is to apologize? ●

The Washington Monthly

Journalism Award

FEBRUARY 2000

DONALD L. BARLETT AND JAMES STEELE

"How the Little Guy Gets Crunched: How to Become a Top Banana"

Time: 2/7

Carl Lindner, the owner of Chiquita Bananas and a man with an $800 million fortune, is one of the biggest donors to both the Republican and the Democratic parties. Not surprisingly, when he got frustrated with his company's difficulty exporting to Europe, he was able to lobby the Clinton administration to slap a massive retaliatory tariff on certain specific European products. The result of this tariff has been the decimation of small companies, like Timothy Dove's family business, Acton Batteries, that rely on importing these European products and selling them here.

RICHARD E. COHEN

"Going to Extremes"

National Journal: 2/26

We've all heard that Congress has become more partisan, but National Journal *proves it with an exhaustive analysis of every congressman's voting record broken into categories of economic, social, and foreign conservatism or liberalism. The most surprising finding: For the first time in the past two decades, not a single Republican has a voting record more liberal than the most conservative democrat. The number of conservative Republicans is increasing and the number of liberal Democrats is increasing. The only group that's shrinking is the centrists.*

MICHAEL GRUNWALD

"How Corps Turned Doubt into a Lock; In an agency where the answer is grow, a questionable project finds support"

The Washington Post: 2/13

In order to justify building huge construction projects on the Mississippi and Illinois rivers, the Army Corps of Engineers cooked the books. This detailed report shows how Corps leaders changed variables and played with the numbers until projects that were underweighed projected costs. Why did they do this? The $12 billion organization with 37,000 employees has a strategic plan known as "grow the Corps."

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Overdose

Why Clinton's Colombia policy needs rehab

By Nicholas Thompson

In the northern Colombian town of El Salado in mid-February, a band of paramilitaries allegedly drank and hooted as they slaughtered almost 30 peasants they suspected of being sympathetic left-wing guerrillas. One man was allegedly killed in a church; others had their heads sliced off on a basketball court. The paramilitaries may have been connected to the Colombian military in some way; they may not have been. Still, nobody in the United States seemed to notice. Mass murder in Colombia seems almost commonplace and when *Reuters* finally put the story on the wire a few days later, only one major American paper picked it up. Just one more massacre that had something to do with drugs and politics.

In the Dirksen Senate Office Building a week later and several thousand miles away, Senator Jeff Sessions lit into Gen. Barry McCaffrey, America's drug czar, and Undersecretary of State Thomas Pickering, for being doves on Colombia. It wasn't enough that McCaffrey and Pickering had shown up to defend a Clinton administration plan to triple military aid to Colombia, a country that receives the third most United States security assistance of any nation on earth. To Sessions, the United States needs far more radical steps to help our southern neighbor. "We used to have a strong will and now we don't!" he thundered. Pickering tried to explain the complexities of the situation and McCaffrey insisted that we are making progress. But Sessions, turning redder and redder, would have none of it: "The nation will not prevail until there's progress on the battlefield!"

There was definitely something in what the senator said. If you go to war, you want to win battles; and to win battles, you've got to be committed. But there was also something deeply unnerving: If you're going to win battles, you've got to know who you're fighting and, in Colombia, it's really not clear. Everybody's hands seem a little bit bloody and every corridor seems a little bit dark. Clinton's proposal would give aid to the government, ostensibly, to fight drug production. So are we just going to war against the drug runners who are supplying America's cities with cocaine and heroin? Or are we also going to war with the leftist guerrillas fighting the government and often allied with the drug runners? Are we going to be fighting on the same side as the paramilitaries responsible for the El Salado massacre—international pariahs and public-enemies who have their own ties to the drug trade but oppose the guerrillas?

The Clinton administration has a serious plan and there's a good chance it will pass. But before it does, we should stop and think about what Senator Sessions seemed to be saying. If you're going to wade into a mess like this with guns-a-blazing, you'd better know who and what you're fighting for, and you'd better be sure you're willing to pay the price it's going to take to win.

Jungle War

Mention of Colombia almost immediately brings analogies to Vietnam. One week after Sen. Sessions' outburst, Sen. Ted Stevens demanded of Gen. Charles Wilhelm the commander in chief of the United States' Southern Command: "Who's going to be there when this blows up? Tell me this isn't Vietnam." In recent months, every media outlet seems to have drawn the comparison and *The Washington Post* and *The Financial Times* even chose an identical headline for different articles: "Shades of Vietnam."

This is not surprising. Much of our foreign policy is conditioned by a visceral fear of repeating the disasters of the war in Southeast Asia. But the mistake we have to avoid in Colombia isn't sending troops into jungle action without full public commitment; the White House and Congress have emphatically declared that troops aren't going south and there's almost no chance that the Colombian end-game will see American soldiers dying in the jungle while flags burn at home.

But the mistake we *are* in danger of repeating in Colombia lies in our decision-making process. Our Vietnam policy was crafted by highly intelligent people with legitimate strategic concerns who thought

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they were acting in the country's best interests. The problem was their lack of information: They underestimated the North's tenacity, overestimated our allies' competence, and misjudged the public's endurance for war. We didn't look the situation squarely in the eyes, we didn't hedge our bets enough to offset the complexities of that war, and we didn't listen closely to people on the ground who considered the war hopeless.

With Colombia, we need to put a heavy burden of proof squarely on the shoulders of those who urge increasing our military aid. There are reasons to charge into Colombia—a country in quasi-anarchy whose drugs are pouring across our borders—but we shouldn't unless we know our goals and exit strategy, unless we know it's clear that we won't end up directly or indirectly massacring innocent Colombians, and unless we know the benefits conclusively outweigh the costs. Unfortunately, this burden is far from being met.

The Problem and the Plan

Just a few hours south of Miami by plane, Colombia produces about 80 percent of the cocaine used in this country and more than half of the heroin. Farmers grow their coca crop deep in the jungle or in the mountains and sell it to traffickers. The traffickers then process it in mobile laboratories and smuggle their product across our border with elaborate networks of traffickers organized by cell phones, the Internet, and good old machine guns. Once here, the drugs offer quick buzzes and destroy lives. Over 50,000 people suffer drug-related deaths in the United States each year and Gen. McCaffrey continually emphasizes studies that show that illegal drug use annually costs this country $110 billion.

The Clinton administration believes in developing a broad strategy for our national drug control policy and the current plan—more or less a steroid-enhanced version of the policies of the Bush administration and Clinton's first seven years—seeks to increase funding to choke off the supply side. Specifically, the plan calls for $1.3 billion in additional aid over the next two years on top of $300 million that has already been budgeted. Almost $600 million of the new money would be spent arming and training the Colombian army for a push into the country's remote southern regions where most of the coca is currently grown. Much of this would be spent purchasing 30 high-powered Black Hawk helicopters and 33 UH-1Ns, commonly known as Hueys, the workhorse helicopters of the Vietnam War. A further $350 million would go to upgrade radar systems and provide narcotics intelligence assistance to Colombian security forces and drug interdiction units in neighboring countries; $100 million would go to the Colombian National Police for coca eradication programs, and the rest would be targeted toward economic development and civil projects. Roughly 80 percent of the total amount is dedicated to security and military; 20 percent is dedicated to economic assistance and social aid.

Colombia in Chaos

To determine the potential efficacy of the aid, one needs to look at the political situation and the different groups battling with, and around, the military we'd be supporting. Colombia has been wracked by armed conflict for much of its history, and for more than 30 years a leftist insurgency group, known as the Armed Revolutionary Forces of Colombia (FARC), and the Colombian government have been locked in a struggle in which each seems to lose equally. The FARC was founded in 1966 in reaction to the oligarchic settlement of the bloody 10-year war between the Conservatives and Liberals known as "La Violencia" that left more than 200,000 Colombians dead. Today, mixing its own particular brand of terrorism, extortion, and socialism, the FARC controls territory that, although sparsely populated, exceeds the size of California and represents 40 percent of the country.

The FARC operates as a coalition of highly organized fronts scattered around the country with a stronghold in the south. The guerrillas specialize in kidnapping and are fairly well armed—better equipped, in fact, than the Colombian military, according to our Congressional Research Service. Guerrillas generally base themselves in camps—tents, barracks, and, quite often, a soccer field—buried deep in the jungle from which they send out multiple lines of roving patrols to ambush and warn of approaching government troops. Politically, the FARC is a mixture of grizzled idealists still pushing a socialist agenda—according to conservative analyst Andy Messing of the National Defense Council Foundation, leaders like FARC's commander Manuel "Sure Shot" Marulanda, "are very serious and they clearly want a better life for Colombians"—and brutal, opportunistic murderers reveling in power and the money they wrestle from the drug trade. Last year, the FARC kidnapped and murdered three American human-rights advocates without any apparent reason—they demanded no ransom and offered no explanation.

On the other side of the political spectrum are right-wing paramilitary forces—organizations of loosely-knit mercenaries maintained primarily to pro-

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tect private business and drug dealers from the FARC and the ELN, another, smaller, violent leftist insurgency. Many of the paramilitary groups operating today were founded by the government in the late 1970s, but official connections between the two were legally cut a decade ago. Today, the State Department estimates that paramilitaries cause 70 percent of the human rights violations that plague Colombia.

In no small part, the paramilitaries exist to hunt the FARC, the ELN, and people who support them. On March 1, letting his face be shown for the first time in seven years, Carlos Castano, the leader of the largest paramilitary group (and a man who has been fighting the FARC since they kidnapped and murdered his father more than 20 years ago) told a Colombian television station: "Guerrillas are military objectives of ours, whether they are dressed as civilians or in uniform. I know this violates international humanitarian law. But the guerrillas violate humanitarian law all the time.... This is a really vile war."

Colombian President Andres Pastrana has worked to break remaining governmental ties with the paramilitaries. Still, as might be expected from two institutions fighting the same enemies, there are, at least de facto, links and, quite possibly, some serious, tight, and brutal connections. A February report by Human Rights Watch reported that there is "detailed, abundant, and compelling evidence of close ties between the Colombian Army and paramilitary groups responsible for gross human rights violations." One gruesome example detailed how members of the Colombian Army's Fourth Brigade joined forces with paramilitaries to surround the village of El Aro, later burning more than half of the residents' homes and killing 11 people. Why? Because the villagers were suspected of being sympathetic to the FARC. One store owner, Aurelio Areiza, was tied to a tree and had his eyes gouged out and tongue and testicles cut off before his eventual execution.

The State Department responds that recipients of U.S. military aid are required to be vetted for past human rights abuses and that none of the recipients of our current package was specifically mentioned by Human Rights Watch. But while serious improvements have been made over the past decade, this distinction is a little too neat and the lines aren't nearly as clear as one would hope. According to Human Rights Watch, the commander of the brigade responsible for the alleged massacre in El Aro, General Carlos Ospina, has since been promoted to head Colombia's fourth division—an army unit of three brigades in southern Colombia, one of which will soon be receiving Black Hawks and Hueys if the aid package goes through.

War and Peace

Along with many smaller groups such as the ELN, the FARC and the paramilitaries are both causes and symptoms of an imploding society. To a degree, Colombia has been at war with itself since it was founded in 1830 by the revolutionary leaders, and later rivals, Simon Bolivar and Francisco de Paula Santander. It began this century with a bloody "thousand days' war" and since then has averaged one civil war every decade, many arising from the country's startling class stratifications. Today, the raging war has forced approximately 300,000 'displaced people' to leave their homes.

This bloody chaos has helped create an ideal environment for the drug business—and that business has pulled the country down even further. Illegal narcotics are Colombia's third-largest export and Robert White, former Ambassador to El Salvador, argues that, "You can't have a business like that without having some sort of support from police, from banks, from the military." The evidence bears him out: In November 1998, the chief of the military air transport command for the

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Colombian army was caught trying to smuggle half a ton of cocaine into Miami on his official airplane. Even U.S. officials aren't completely to be trusted. Laurie Hiett, wife of a former U.S. military attache in Colombia, recently pleaded guilty to smuggling $700,000 worth of heroin through our embassy's mail service.

With the nation spinning out of control it's not surprising that there is one thing that everyone seems to agree on: They want peace. President Pastrana was elected primarily because of his pledge to bring peace to his country and, this November, approximately five million people took to Colombia's streets demanding peace under banners reading "No Mas" or, in English, "No More." The FARC has begun negotiating with the government (senior officials from both camps have just returned from a joint tour of Europe) and even Castano says he wants an end to conflict.

Most Colombians, like many Israelis, Palestinians, and residents of Northern Ireland, are just sick of living in a state of perpetual civil war. The war has forced people out of their homes, torn apart civil infrastructure (in Medellín, Colombia's second largest city, university buildings are riddled with bullet holes and residents tell of endless nightly gunfire) and disrupted the economy. It also pulls good people into the drug trade. Many farmers are forced to grow coca simply because they have no other way to make a living. Many have two choices: grow coffee, for example, and drive it to markets over miles of torn-up roads stalked by guerrillas and paramilitaries; or grow coca to sell profitably when drug-runners come to pick it up at your doorstep.

The Hit

At first glance, the Clinton proposal has little to do with the civil war or making peace. Administration officials claim that it is exclusively an attempt to knock out the drug trade and has nothing to do with the insurgency. But this is a distinction without a huge difference; money that goes to the military will almost certainly slip into counter-insurgency. The Colombian military isn't focused solely on the drug campaign. They have been fighting the FARC for 30 years and neither they nor any FARC commander with a surface-to-air missile is going to care whether a reconnaissance helicopter has been assigned to a counter-drug or counter-insurgency mission.

Raul Reyes, top negotiator for the FARC, told *The Associated Press* on February 28: "Plan Colombia, as we understand it, is no more than a way... for hawks in the United States to become more deeply involved in our internal affairs... It's a declaration of war by the United States." Even Under Secretary of State Pickering hasn't been able to avoid touching the issue: "Our goals in the military field are to eliminate the transport and production of narcotics. If the guerrillas are taking part, and I've no doubt they are, then they will be targets of our fight."

But $1.6 billion is emphatically not enough either to win the drug war or to knock out the insurgency. Over the past decade, Colombian cocaine production has skyrocketed, even as we have poured hundreds of millions of dollars into the Andes. This doesn't mean the aid so far has done nothing (the problem would probably be worse if we had stood aside) but it does suggest that our current solution (and maybe any solution short of, say, $100 billion) will do little. Drug production has a way of operating like a girdle: squeeze down in one place, and it just pops out in another. When Peru stabilized its political situation in the early 1990s, drug production there began to plunge as traffickers simply moved east into the chaos of Colombia. Meanwhile, the biggest triumph the United States has had in the war on drugs in Colombia—the defeat of the Cali and Medellín cartels and the killing of Pablo Escobar in the early '90s—appeared not to make a dime's worth of difference. New, less-centralized and harder-to-isolate, traffickers filled their shoes and drug production shot up. Even if drug production was eradicated in Colombia, it's quite possible the traffickers would just move into Ecuador (where the military recently toppled the government) or Brazil.

Furthermore, the military's war on the FARC seems presently unwinnable and $1.6 billion is not going to change that equation. Colombia is more than three times the size of Vietnam and fifty times the size of El Salvador and, if anything, the FARC has been gaining ground on the army over the past two years of this more-than-30-year-war, though the government has won the most recent battles. The army deploys significantly more soldiers than the FARC (about 130,000 vs. 15,000) but more than two thirds of them (including, by law, every high-school graduate) are stationed in defensive positions and the guerrillas have proved themselves much more mobile than the military. In the jungle territory the rebels call home, the FARC has built and mapped networks of trails that allow them to move easily from one place to another while the army, frightened of ambush on the enemy-built trails, trudges slowly with compass-based navigation. The helicopters provided by the United States will certainly help the army's fight, but, in a country as large

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as Colombia, 60 helicopters manned by soldiers with limited training is not going to turn the tide.

The Price of Peace

The danger of the administration's aid package is that it will simply intensify the violence. The FARC will see it as a foreign invasion, the poorly disciplined military will start to run rampant, the drug trade won't be slowed at all, and the only people who will really lose will be those caught in the crossfire—as has always been the case in Colombia.

But a $1.6 billion military aid package is not our only option. If we wanted to be sure to stay out of the war, and if we wanted to keep our hands clean of human rights violations, we could conceivably give the government money for schools and roads, not machine guns and helicopters. Instead of spending $200 million out of $1.6 billion on civil programs, we could spend every cent on them. Indeed, as this article goes to press, Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-Ill.) and Rep. Tom Campbell (R-Ca.) have taken the Hippocratic position of "first do no harm" and are circulating a "Dear Colleague" letter requesting that we stop considering any military aid.

There is merit to Schakowsky and Campbell's plea; but there's also reason not to go that far. If you build schools you still need to protect the children from being kidnapped by the FARC. If you build roads you may be facilitating drug smuggling. But even so, to protect the schools and roads, you don't need to provide hundreds of millions of dollars worth of Black Hawks. According to former Ambassador White, one of the plan's most vehement and public critics: "Would I support the aid package if it was 75 percent targeted toward civilians and 25 percent targeted toward the military? Of course." Michael Shifter of the Inter-America Dialogue and one of the most respected Colombia experts in the country told me that the plan "is disappointing" and "misses an opportunity... I'm not sure giving them 60 helicopters to fight drugs is the wisest thing to do."

Armed and Dangerous

The administration counters the argument that its aid package is too focused on the military by noting that the United States' aid is simply a share of Plan Colombia, a blueprint for national Colombia's development that balances military and non-military aid and includes contributions from Colombia, the United States, other countries, and international organizations. And, for better or for worse, the United States has the reputation for being the country most willing to provide military aid. Sweden and the World Bank aren't going to give the Colombian military Black Hawk helicopters.

This argument, although not specious, is disingenuous. It is true that President Pastrana was talking about a Colombian "Marshall Plan" even before his election, but there's evidence that the United States pushed a great portion of the military aid into the Plan or, at the very least, strongly suggested it during consultation. According to one defense analyst very familiar with the negotiations "it wasn't written by Colombians for Colombians; it was written by Colombians and Americans for Americans." According to the Center for International Policy, a non-profit organization that opposes the aid package, the first draft of the Plan, written entirely in Spanish, contained very little military planning. The final draft, which provides for the aid that the United States is supplying, was written with significant U.S. counsel and, according to opposition party leader Luis Guillermo Velez, quoted in the Colombian paper *El Tiempo*, "The first information that we had of the famous Plan Colombia came to us directly from the American Embassy and in English."

Why do we need to give them helicopters? Because it's in Plan Colombia. Why is it in Plan Colombia? Because we need to give them helicopters.

The leader of the opposition party may just be trying to embarrass President Pastrana, but there still seems to be strong evidence that our administration has wedded itself to circular logic to support the military emphasis. Why do we need to give them helicopters? Because it's in Plan Colombia. Why is it in Plan Colombia? Because we need to give them helicopters.

The administration does have some strong reasons for wanting to act forcefully in this way—Pastrana is far more trustworthy than his predecessor, the

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Colombian military is becoming more and more organized and reputable, and helicopters are a very useful tool for jungle drug interdiction. Still, there are also reasons to suspect that U.S. enthusiasm may be more a function of politics and the usual suspects than efficacy.

First, an aid policy so focused on military aid lets the Clinton administration (and the Democrats) look tough on drugs in an election year. Despite the billions that Clinton has poured into the drug war, the administration constantly faces fire for being soft. In August, Representative Dan Burton (R-Ind.) condemned the Clinton White House: "There is no war on drugs being waged by this administration unless you count the $200 million General McCaffrey spends annually for... television ads and these Frisbees and key chains." Sen. Mitch McConnell refers to 1985-92 as "the era of 'Just say no'" and 1993-99 as "the era of 'I wish I had inhaled.'"

The Republican strategy has worked: According to research done this fall by the Mellman group, a Democractic polling organization, the public believes the Democrats are doing a better job than Republicans on almost every issue, from balancing the budget to improving education. The one issue where Republicans have a clear advantage is "keeping out illegal drugs."

A military aid package so wrapped around hardware also offers substantial advantages to U.S.-based companies. United Technologies, the manufacturer of the unquestionably-effective Black Hawk helicopters, is based in Stratford, Conn., in the home state of Sen. Christopher Dodd, ranking member of the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Narcotics, and extremely near the district of Rep. Sam Gejdenson, the ranking member of the House International Relations Committee. According to the Center for Responsive Politics, United Technologies and its employees have given $33,200 to Dodd and $19,000 to Gejdenson over the past two years. Even if, as their spokesmen claim, neither Sen. Dodd or Rep. Gejdenson thought directly of donor obligations while considering the plan, money does have a funny way of working in Washington and, over time, policies that help out powerful lobbies do have a curiously strong tendency to win out over those that don't. Rep. Schakowsky said to me: "I have no doubt that, in some ways, this is about helicopters."

Third, and most importantly, the bill has to pass Congress and many Congressmen, particularly on the very powerful Republican far right, would much rather give money to fight guerrillas than to promote development. As Sen. Sessions demanded incredulously of Gen. McCaffrey and Undersecretary Pickering, "Is it the position of the United States that we are neutral [between the FARC and the government]?" Rep. Burton goes even further, using rhetoric that takes us back to the Cold War: "Colombia is important because, should democracy fall there, and a narco-state prevail or a Marxist-led government run by the FARC narco-terrorists succeed democracy, we are at severe risk in the United States." Burton's may be an extreme case, but he's also one of the congressional Republicans who have invested the most time and effort in the issue.

Just Say No

If the package does go through, the administration argues that, in a best-case scenario, the threat of increased U.S. weaponry could help to push the FARC to the negotiating table as well as push them to keep their promises (as they very rarely have before). Then, if peace could be brought between the government and the FARC, perhaps the paramilitaries would begin to layoff, peace would come to the entire country, and Pastrana's successor would have the opportunity to crack down on the drug trade.

But there's a lot that could scuttle that scenario: the FARC might not be frightened by the money, it might just harden their resolve; it could become clear that Black Hawk helicopters are being used to slaughter villagers in places like El Salado or El Aro; Pastrana may be replaced by a hard-liner opposed to the peace process.

These are all distinct possibilities and strongly suggest that the current aid proposal doesn't come close to clearing the high bar for military involvement our experiences in Vietnam should have taught us to set. The situation on the ground in Colombia is more like Vietnam than Kosovo or Iraq. We don't know exactly what's going on; we don't have clear objectives; and there's a fairly good chance that our guns and helicopters will merely increase the conflict and tear the country apart a little bit more. The odds of bringing peace by offering a package that emphasizes carrots seem just as likely as the odds of bringing peace through a package of sticks. And with carrots, you can't swing, miss, and break your own knee-cap.

The unfortunate truth is that domestic politics have probably helped push us into a situation where we are forced to provide an aid package that is too militarized, and too likely to blow up in our faces. In fact, as we plunge toward Colombia, it almost seems as though we've only learned one thing since our mistakes in Vietnam: how to make new ones. ●

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Cynicism Without Solutions

A thoughtful author's pessimism about special interests

By James Bennet

In early March, as John McCain's banging of the "iron triangle" reached fever pitch, a poignant little ceremony took place at the National Press Club in downtown Washington. In a windowless room, officers of the American League of Lobbyists (ALL), gathered to unveil their spanking new code of ethics, and to share their pain.

GOVERNMENT'S END:
Why Washington Stopped Working
By Jonathan Rauch
Public Affairs, $12.00

Two lobbyists told of how their mothers burst into tears at the news that their offspring had joined the profession. Another said sadly that his son did not know what he did and did not care to learn. Another recalled a family gathering where he was snickered at by some, yelled at by the rest.

It has never been easy to tell your loved ones—or, for that matter, complete strangers—that you are a lobbyist. And it is only getting harder as the term "special interest" gathers the kind of totemic, repulsive force that "Mason" once held in American politics. Presidential candidates fell all over each other this year in the scramble to declare their hatred of these sinister influences. But Al Gore sometimes gave the emptiness of this talk away, when in reeling off the list of interests he has opposed he stretched for a word to encompass the scope of his belligerence and declared that he has fought against "everyone."

Everyone is, of course, who the special interests add up to. At the press club, Kenneth E. Feltman, the president of the aptly-acronymed ALL, made much the same point as Gore, if more intentionally and plaintively. "You know, all of us have a lobbyist," he told the tiny assemblage of reporters. "If you have a credit card, you have a lobbyist. Are you a member of a frequent flier club? You have a lobbyist." Do you read books? Then whether you buy them or check them out of a library, you have a lobbyist. "Are you married? Well, you have a lobbyist. Single? Yes. Separated? Yes."

That we are all players in the lobbying game is a fact that Jonathan Rauch documents, with a relentlessness bordering on cruelty, in *Government's End.* Bear with me while I summarize:

Mature democracies, Rauch argues, inevitably are larded with associations of narrow interests competing to redistribute to their clients the wealth created by others. Hence the National Paint Varnish and Lacquer Association, the Frozen Pizza Institute, the Possum Growers and Breeders Association. Each new federal program calls into being new constituencies, which then lobby to preserve it, in effect turning every federal program into an entitlement. If the program accomplishes its original mission, it finds a new one. With so much pie-carving afoot, any group that abstains is acting against its own interest; that is why in 1987 the Baha'i faith opened a $400,000 lobbying office—even though it forbids its members to participate in politics.

In the aggregate, the costs of this special pleading are enormous. But legislators approach programs individually, awarding 10 million here and 10 million there. Since the benefit of, say, a sugar subsidy to one group is huge, while its particular cost to each taxpayer is tiny, that group will fight far more intensely for its preservation than the citizenry will for its elimination—though occasionally some deft public relations is required. When it was discovered that the federal government was spending millions to promote products like Chicken McNuggets and

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Mars candy overseas, Congress cut some of the program's funding, but it also changed its name. Targeted Export Assistance, which sounded like a handout, became the Market Promotion Program, which still sounded like corporate welfare, and then finally wound up as the Market Access Program, which sounded like a righteous kick in some foreigner's pants.

This is all well told in *Government's End*. Rauch profoundly understands the lobbying culture and its enabling cons. He understands that lobbyists, like the folks from ALL, think of themselves as valiantly serving the public—indeed, that one of the keys to the system's endurance is that each player thinks of himself and his cause as good, and of his opponents as threats to the common weal.

But—and thanks for your patience—didn't all that sound a little familiar? If it did, that means that you have been alive and have paid at least scant attention to public policy at some point in the last 20 years. I have admired Rauch's reporting and analysis, in the *National Journal* and elsewhere, for years. He is a crisp and persuasive writer, and he is refreshingly willing to stand conventional wisdom on its head. But his new book falls prey to the success he, this magazine, and others have had for some time now in portraying the special interest culture. Rauch described it in a previous version of this book, "Demosclerosis." By contrast, his proposals for addressing this culture get elbowed further and further back, until they are finally found cowering in the final pages.

Rauch uses his aggregation of lobbying tales to build a case for hopelessness, which he casts as hard-nosed realism and, ultimately, argues could serve as the ground for hope. This system is here to stay, he insists. "Government has become what it is and will remain: a large, incoherent, often incomprehensible mass that is solicitous of its clients but impervious to any broad coherent program of reform. *And this evolution cannot be reversed.*" And since government reform is impossible, fresh government action against other problems is also a pipe dream. Existing programs have eaten up so much of the discretionary budget, and the programs' clients fight so fiercely to preserve their benefits, that government innovation is crowded out. "In a society dense with professional lobbies," he contends, "FDR's brand of experimental central government cannot exist."

Rauch provides a compact and illuminating tour of the reform efforts of the past 20 years, from the attempts of Ronald Reagan and Newt Gingrich to dispose of programs to Bill Clinton's attempt to create one big one, health care. All three leaders failed, Rauch argues, because they had no room to maneuver among entrenched interests. "Taxpayers will not allow the government to do a great deal more than it does," he writes. "Sorry, liberals. The client groups, however, will not allow the government to do much less than it does. Sorry, conservatives."

Rauch harbors doubts about the usefulness of reformers' grails, like changing the campaign finance system and imposing term limits. He calls instead for devolving more federal programs to the states, so that lobbies would have to disperse their influence around the country, and for competition for federal programs, like vouchers in education. Neither argument is adequately developed. But he is clearly right when he calls on liberals to take the lead in searching out programs to eliminate, in order to create the space for the ones the country needs.

In the end, Rauch urges a "radical incrementalism" that admits government cannot be overhauled. Once voters abandon their dreams of a house-cleaning, reformers can scrub away bit by bit, combining "maturely diminished expectations" with "maturely persistent ministrations." He never really explains how these reformers will summon the political will for such hard work when the voters no longer much care.

Rauch is too smart not to sense the paucity of his prescriptions, and he acknowledges toward the end of his book that "you may feel unsatisfied." I sure did. I wished I had read a different book—one that could well have been written by Rauch. It would have looked instead at those moments when government managed to break through the encrusted special interests, moments that *Government's End* treats glancingly. Against a briefer description of the stultifying influence of lobbies, a look at what has gone right or at least involved fundamental change—the tax reform of 1986, the welfare reform of 1996, the erasure of the federal deficit, the reduction in crime rates—could provide a primer for government reform; or, if Rauch prefers, a more persuasive argument that such change is unlikely, and only possible under exceptional circumstances.

It seems to me, though, that we are in a time of exceptional circumstances, when prosperity is combined with a potent political thirst for reform and when such a primer would be valuable. Rauch writes that the period from 1981 until "perhaps" 1996 "marks the most concentrated period of government reformism since the Progressives swept to power" almost 100 years ago. I don't think that period is

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over. The reform urge is sharpening, not subsiding, which helps account for McCain's amazing run and for the loosening of the two parties' grip on the electorate. We may all be implicated in the hobbling of government. And particularly this year, as George W. Bush calls himself a "Reformer with Results" and Gore claims a lifelong passion for tightening the campaign finance system he abused, Rauch is right to raise doubts about any politician's sweeping promises of change. But voter frustration with government is so great that the right candidate could use it to do more than just get elected by railing against special interests. If a reform candidate hopes to get anything done he needs to have the guidance of experts like Rauch, but he better not have maturely diminished expectations.

Oh—about that new ethics code for lobbyists. The American League of Lobbyists tightened its old rules, but in ways that unintentionally highlighted how dodgy the system is. The new rules insisted, for example, that a lobbyist, on learning that something he had told a government official was false, should immediately correct his earlier statements; that a lobbyist should have a "basic understanding" of the "legislative and governmental process;" that a lobbyist should actually perform the work his clients are paying for.

These poor people from ALL were a fat target, and they knew it. Yet they urged the reporters in the room not to cynically dismiss what they insisted was a good-faith effort. No, they would not enforce the code themselves, they said, but journalists could use it to hammer malefactors. They did not pretend such malefactors did not exist. And they complained about how awful it was to receive as many as 40 invitations to fundraisers in one day, and how degrading and disillusioning it was to be ordered by a Senator to drum up paying guests for such events. If even lobbyists now perceive the need for reform—or even if they just perceive the need to appear to perceive the need for reform—isn't there hope for change that goes beyond maturely persistent ministrations? ●

Bush Lite

The record is slim

By Myra MacPherson

EVERY NIGHT GEORGE W. BUSH SHOULD get down on his knees and thank the Lord that his father was born before he was. That is the inevitable conclusion of *Shrub: The Short but Happy Political Life of George W. Bush* by Molly Ivins and Lou Dubose. Before big business and Bush found each other, the governor himself admitted that he was "all name and no money."

SHRUB: The Short But Happy Political Life of George W. Bush
By Molly Ivins and Lou Dubose
Random House, $19.95

All his adult life, Bush has been an influence peddler—trading on his father's name. In quid pro quo fashion, Bush the younger found rich family friends or those seeking political access who were eager to find him a berth in that lily-white bastion for Vietnam draft avoiders, the National Guard, subsidize his baseball team, bail out his failing oil businesses, and drop fat checks into his political coffers.

Recounting Bush's flops and bail outs—most of the oil money was raised during the time his father was running for president or was vice president—Ivins writes, "As predictably as the hero would pull the damsel off the railroad tracks in *The Perils of Pauline*, another investor showed up to save Dubya's ass." As one hapless investor said, "He knew everybody in the United States who was worth knowing."

Since *Shrub* was written by Molly Ivins, the wise and witty political columnist, it is often very funny but she and her co-author Lou Dubose have backed up the barbs with research and citations to inves-

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tigative articles by other members of the media.

Writes Ivins about George W: "He owes his political life to big corporate money: He's a CEO's wet dream. He carries their water... George W. Bush is a wholly owned subsidiary of corporate America...." You don't have to be a Rhodes Scholar to figure out that most of his time as governor was spent greasing the way for big business, or "bidness," Ivins' phrase that gets her in trouble with eastern establishment critics. But her ear is always correct: Texans do say "bidness" and they also pronounce Bush the Younger's middle initial as "Dubya," her frequent sobriquet.

An Oily Past

Shrub is a prescient primer for followers of his presidential campaign. This goes not only for interested voters but for the establishment media, many of whom mindlessly fawned over him. The book demonstrates that Bush paid scant attention to the nuts and bolts process of governing, never was averse to bragging and taking the reward for the achievements of others, and never was a stranger to below-the-belt distortions in campaign speeches and ads. We can expect more of the same as this campaign unfolds.

Although crime went down during Ann Richard's governorship, for example, Bush capitalized on a slight rise in juvenile crime and ran an ad campaign depicting an apparently real-life incident of a helpless female being beaten by two masked muggers. Turns out it was the creation of an ad man. But with a caption denouncing Richards, it went over big.

Ivins gives Bush high marks in one category—his devotion to improving public education—but she is apoplectic about him taking credit for much that he didn't do. The push to toughen up a system that allowed the promotion of students with unsatisfactory grades had begun months before he took office. Some of the credit belongs to Ross Perot, appointed to a previous education task force, and his "no pass, no play" get tough attack on uneducated athletes.

As for compassionate conservatism, his laughable slogan, "A Reformer with Results" belies the truth. He proudly runs on a record that most politicians would want to run from. "[I]s the air cleaner since I became governor? ...the answer is yes," trumpeted Bush last May, giving new meaning to the word chutzpah. This was a "perverse distortion of reality" because Bush is, "to put it mildly, part of the problem," writes Ivins. He personally intervened to protect major air polluters and appointed alleged environmental watch dogs who were "staggeringly dreadful," including one who worked for the Monsanto Chemical Company for three decades, and then became a lobbyist for the Texas Chemical Council. Texas air and water pollution is rated the worst in the nation and Texas leads all states in recognized carcinogens in the air. In a twofer of particularly smarmy proportions, Bush cronies made a mockery of campaign finance reform by shelling out $2.5 million in anti-McCain ads in New York, California, and Ohio. Totally unhinged from reality, the ads accused McCain of anti-environmental positions—even though Bush is by far the greater polluter of the two.

Texas is also number one in executions. Macho George went out of his way to make a "savagely punitive system" worse. This includes tightening already draconian laws covering juvenile delinquents, opposing drug treatment programs, and executing the mentally retarded. According to polls, even this death-penalty loving state doesn't take kindly to executing people with I.Q.s of 60.

A further examination of this compassionate conservative's "achievements": The state also is number one in the number of people who lack health insurance: a full quarter of the population. Last year, writes Ivins, "Bush attempted to bar 200,000 children from a low-cost federal-state health-insurance program and discourage poor children from receiving free health care to which they are entitled under federal law." At the same time "he was personally flogging the only bill he designated 'emergency legislation': a $45 million tax break which he sold as a "benefit for only the owners of 'itty bitty' oil wells. Turned out that most of the marginal wells were owned by Exxon."

Meanwhile, this "compassionate conservative" opposed hate-crime legislation (even after Texas' vicious dragging murder of a black man) and supported bills to ban gay adoptions.

When it comes to bucking big business, the little guy is treated with even more contempt. While campaigning last year, Bush told a disadvantaged Baltimore youth that raising the minimum wage was a "bad idea." It will come as no surprise to *Shrub* readers that Bush recently vowed that he would be a tort-reform president and would not have sought an investigation of Bill Gates and Microsoft. At every opportunity he put tort reform—which insulates the corporate world from lawsuits filed by consumers, injured workers, or the survivors of those

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killed by negligence or malice—on the Texas legislature's fast track. Eventually, his tighter-than-a-tick alliance with big business has paid off with a $60 million war chest (mostly spent before Super Tuesday) that made it possible for him to forgo matching federal funds and their restrictions while (chutzpah again) calling himself the "real" reformer.

Ivins regards one Bush business deal as smelly as the air over Texas. He unloaded his stock in his failing oil business "before news of the company's precarious health was made public." *U.S. News & World Report* noted that there was "substantial evidence to suggest that Bush knew" that the company was "in dire straits." Although insiders liquidating large blocks of stock are required to notify the Securities and Exchange Commission immediately, Bush did not report the sale until eight months after the federal deadline. The requirements he violated are "intended to stop board members from bailing out and leaving less informed stockholders holding an empty bag—which is exactly what he did," observes Ivins.

"If Bush does make it to the White House, he and Laura should have Ken Starr over for dinner," she reasons. If Starr's abuse of power hadn't so tainted the independent-counsel office, Congress might have reauthorized the statute. Thus "leaving the door open for a court-appointed prosecutor to investigate a president's son who flipped his oil companies faster than a Texas S&L can daisy-chain a Dallas condo." Bush "walked away from the whole mess with more money than Bill Clinton ever dreamed of making on a little real estate deal known as Whitewater."

President Dubya

As for Bush, the presidential candidate, this book is not a prognosticator in one area—the political roller coaster ride that he's already given the country. Ivins gives the affable Bush credit for political smarts, and she views Bush as a competitor who should not be underestimated. If he should stumble, Karl Rove, his long time consultant and current campaign honcho known as "Bush's brain", is by his side to recast his words and image.

But evidently Texas is not a training camp for national elections. Ivins cites as George's shrewdest political move his careful wooing of the Hispanic vote in the blighted Rio Grande Valley, even though he has thrown them mere bones—despite $10 billion budget surpluses in 1997 and 1998. Concludes Ivins, "the record is wildly different from the rhetoric." The compassion candidate is photographed hugging little brown kids and reading to little black kids but Ivins can't find "any evidence that he's done anything at all as governor that would make any differences in their lives, except to make it harder."

As for religion, Bush says he was saved from his wild ways by Billy Graham, another O.F.F. (old family friend). But his convenient political conversion to the Christian right came when that coalition won control of the Texas Republican party. It took political savvy, writes Ivins, to appeal to both the religious right and secular Country Club Republicans. For example, before general audiences, Bush ducked the fact that he wants a constitutional amendment on abortion, a position dear to the religious right.

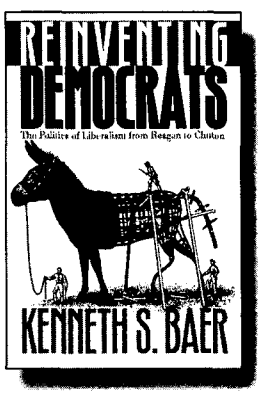
Bush thought he could keep on dissembling until he got the nomination, but McCain, the feisty spoiler, began to lob mortars ("in coming" as they said in Vietnam) and forced Bush to move even further right.

So where were the political smarts in South Carolina? One would have thought Bush had been advised by Gore/Bradley to wrap himself in the confederate flag and to make that unseemly crawl to Bob Jones University, somehow thinking he could avoid the flap that ensued over the institution's racial and Catholic bias. (Only to be followed with a politically induced belated apology to Cardinal John

Reinventing Democrats

The Politics of Liberalism from Reagan to Clinton

Kenneth S. Baer



"An important and artfully told story about the intersection of personalities, political ambition, and the world of ideas. Baer shows us how they fit together. His history of the New Democrats is essential to understanding the dynamics of the 2000 election campaign."—E. J. Dionne, Jr., author of *Why Americans Hate Politics*

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O'Connor in which Bush reminded his eminence that he is a long-time friend of the family.)

God knows it took an alchemist's skill to turn McCain, the card-carrying self-avowed Reaganite, into a dangerous liberal, as Bush succeeded in doing with Republican voters in South Carolina. And Bush kept the liberal blitz up, cornering the Republican vote by capitalizing on such McCain performances as ripping into tobacco companies and televangelist extremists like Pat Robertson. But when Bush gets the nomination, that dog won't hunt, as they say in Texas; he is damaged goods.

Heaven Help Us

As early as 1993, writes Ivins, Rove groomed Bush, ordering him to stick to the script, and to stay "on message." That rote-like coaching continues, with a reading list of books and titles, foreign and domestic affairs advisors (many from Daddy's network) and "on message" edicts which have improved his debate performances. When Bush flies solo we get "Kosovarians," "full exposure" for full disclosure, and such hilarious mixed metaphors as John McCain "can't take the high horse and claim the low road."

Ivins ponders a point that should be examined by any voter seeking enlightenment. "From the record it appears that he doesn't know much, doesn't do much and doesn't care much about governing. The exception is a sustained effort on education with only mixed results. In fact, given his record, it's kind of hard to figure out why he wants a job where he's expected to govern." Why, indeed. Bush promises to do for America what he has done for Texas. Heaven help America.

This is a slim book (179 pages). But then Bush has a slim record. As Ivins and Dubose write, if readers find Bush's resume "a little light, don't blame us. There's really not much there there. We have been looking for six years." ●

Double Legacy

Have a political childhood and eight years under Clinton prepared Al Gore for the presidency?

By Jacob Heilbrunn

Bill Clinton may not, as Al Gore defiantly declared during the impeachment process, be one of the "greatest" American presidents, but he is certainly the most successful Democratic one since Harry Truman. John F. Kennedy was tragically murdered before he could realize his vision of a New Frontier. Lyndon B. Johnson's presidency ended in the jungles of Vietnam. Jimmy Carter was knee-capped by the economy and the storming of the American embassy in Iran.

INVENTING AL GORE: A Biography
By Bill Turque
Houghton Mifflin, $25.00

Today, the situation could not be more different. Crime and inflation are down, while employment is up. The stock market is booming. Welfare is at a historic low. The budget has been balanced. As the economy continues to surge and American preeminence remains unchallenged abroad, Clinton's key role in transforming the United States is starting to become appreciated among the more perceptive members of the right. In the *National Review*, for instance, Norman Podhoretz marveled at how Clinton has moved the Democratic party back to the center, thereby condemning the GOP to impotence. Podhoretz correctly noted that Clinton has turned the old McGovern wing into a rump faction by embracing everything from a balanced budget to welfare reform to school uniforms. Likewise, in foreign affairs, Clinton has not been averse to using military power to forward Wilsonian goals, while the GOP returns to older isolationist impulses. At the same time, Clinton has profited immensely from the nature of his domestic enemies: A key turning point in the fortunes of the GOP was the impeachment hearings, where the social conservatives spun out of control. The current battles among conservatives over John McCain and George W. Bush and the role of the religious right are stage two of a meltdown

Jacob Heilbrunn *is a columnist for Politicalwag.com.*

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created by the successes of the Clinton presidency.

But if Clinton has set the stage for American prosperity, no one might do more to solidify his legacy than Al Gore. In *Inventing Al Gore*, Bill Turque, a veteran *Newsweek* reporter, closely examines the vice president's life and political odyssey. As the son of Senator Albert Gore, Al was always in the political arena. Turque deftly explores his relationship with his parents, his undergraduate years at Harvard, his brief stint in Vietnam, his service in the House and Senate, and his vice-presidency. Turque has conducted numerous interviews and dug deeply into Gore's record. The result is the most substantial and illuminating biography of Gore to appear.

And yet, for all his legwork, Turque falls into the trap of trying to expose character flaws and hypocrisy in Gore. Clinton's personal foibles, coupled with the tabloidization of the media, have apparently made sensationalistic revelations a must for reporters who are pushed by their editors to substitute tawdry details for analysis. In the case of the rectitudinous Gore, however, this method is a little like searching for the hidden scholar in Dan Quayle. To be sure, Turque does provide some interesting information on the Gore family's dealings with the crooked tycoon Armand Hammer. But that isn't what has caused a bit of a stir: Turque's book has received pre-publicity for its "revelation" that, according to a somewhat dubious former friend of Gore's, the vice president was a heavier pot-smoker than he had previously let on. My, my. This is supposed to be shocking? If true, does it render Gore unfit to be president? Turque does not say.

Similarly, Turque tries to make heavy weather out of Gore's visit to the Buddhist temple, his claim that he invented the Internet, and his champagne toast to Chinese leader Li Peng. These acts, Turque says, "tether him even more securely to all that the country wishes to forget about the Clinton years." Not only is it unclear just what the country wishes to forget about the Clinton years, but Turque's insinuations about Gore fail to make a dent. Gore is hardly beyond reproach, but his missteps did not amount to serious offenses. Indeed, it would be a pity if Turque's seemingly obligatory sniping were to obscure the Gore who emerges from this dogged research—a moderate Democrat who, far from reinventing himself, has consistently recognized the importance of technology, the environment, and globalization.

As Turque notes, Gore inherited his interest in these issues from his father. Decisively shaped by his hardscrabble years in Tennessee, Albert Gore Sr. was a New Deal Democrat who saw how big-government projects like the Tennessee Valley Authority could help the little guy. He was a classic Southern Democrat who never veered to the far left, but did push for civil rights, opposed the Vietnam War, and worked to curb the arms race. It's easy to poke fun at his flowery rhetoric, as Turque does, but contrasted with the politically retrograde blow-dried mannequins who people the Senate today, Albert Sr. comes off looking pretty good.

Where Turque shines is in showing the influence that both Gore's mother, as well as his father, had upon him. Gore's mother was the driving force in the family, a classic no-nonsense Southern woman who pushed her husband and son to excel in politics. She played a big part in her husband's congressional and senatorial campaigns, and "when Gore ran his first congressional race in 1976, Pauline was a critical behind-the-scenes player, working her own intricate network of contacts and acquaintances to jump-start her son's candidacy."

Albert Sr., Turque shows, was intent from the outset on turning his son into presidential timber, and even made sure his birth was announced on the front-page of *The Tennessean*. "The public truth of Al Gore's childhood," writes Turque, "was that he lived in a world of privilege and material advantage, created by two striving children of the Depression who endowed him with an immense self-assurance and sense of mission. The personal truth is that those same parental gifts exacted a steep emotional cost."

But the latter assertion may be something of a cliche. Gore seems to have enjoyed himself at St. Albans, and he flourished at Harvard. In the tumultuous '60s, Gore stuck out as a man of Southern reserve but his cool head kept him from lurching into any kind of infantile leftism. One key experience was meeting Harvard instructor Martin Peretz, later publisher of *The New Republic*, under whose influence Gore became chairman of Tennessee Youth for Eugene McCarthy. According to Turque, "Peretz saw in Gore some of the same aversion to dogma and doctrine that would lead to his own estrangement from the left before the end of the antiwar movement." As an adviser to Gore, Peretz has shaped many of Gore's tough stances on foreign policy, and would undoubtedly play a major role in a Gore administration as a member of his kitchen cabinet.

Gore was almost the only member the Harvard class of 1969 to join the army. He also volunteered to go to Vietnam. Why? According to Turque, "Gore's motivations were a mix of familial obligation and personal ambition, and shipping out was the last full measure of devotion to the senator's cause." His father was

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embroiled at the time in a vicious fight with Republican candidate William Brock for re-election to the Senate. Brock ran a smear campaign, a prototype of later Republican efforts. "Bill Brock Believes in the Things We Believe In," Brock's ads stated, a coded appeal to white resentment against blacks. Gore's father lost. Al never forgot the defeat—a reason, though Turque does not mention it, for his present toughness on the campaign trail.

Back from Vietnam, Gore went to divinity school and worked as a local reporter. He was determined to do good, but, in his own recollection, became frustrated by the limitations of newspaper stories. He didn't just want to report news; he wanted to make it. In 1976 he won a House seat. Even though he was finally following the career his father had chosen for him, he refused to allow his father to play an active role in the race, for fear that he would be tagged a raging liberal. The presidency was never far from his mind: His father declared that Al was "starting out one year earlier than I did, so maybe that means he'll go one step farther." Turque astutely observes that the 28-year-old Gore was quite conscious about not appearing too much the whipper-snapper: He began to part his hair down the side, not the middle, and stuck to the blue suit, white shirt, and red tie which became his "campaign uniform." Gore also was careful not to run the risk of appearing too much the liberal, like his father. He declared that homosexuality was "abnormal," opposed additional gun-registration laws, and supported the Hyde amendment barring federal assistance in ending pregnancies that resulted from rape or incest.

Gore's big issues, of course, were the environment and the arms race. But he was careful never to go too far. When one environmentalist challenged him to oppose a pork-barrel dam in Tennessee, Gore was unmoved. "What do you want me to do?" he replied. "Commit political suicide?" Gore also assembled the staff that would form the backbone of his run for the presidency in 2000. He became pals with Tom Downey, then a congressman, now a big fundraiser for Gore, as well as Peter Knight, also a fundraiser. On foreign policy, the most important aide he had was Leon Fuerth, a former pilot and Foreign Service officer who tutored him on nuclear policy. Gore made a name for himself by trying to reach a compromise between the unilateral disarmers in the Democratic Party and the hawks in the Reagan administration who wanted to squander vast sums on an MX missile. Gore came up with a compromise called the midgetman. In the end, it all proved moot when Mikhail Gorbachev agreed to even more sweeping arms-control concessions than had been thought possible.

In 1984, Gore won back his old man's seat in the Senate. When he was sworn in, Turque reports, Albert Sr. told Martin Peretz, "This is the beginning." Gore became even more driven. "His hair got shorter," says Turque, "his suits even more conservative, and his tolerance for imperfect staff work sank to zero... the House years had been a dress rehearsal for a bigger production that had just begun." After a disastrous run for the presidency in 1988, Gore signed on with Clinton in 1992. Turque believes the two men complement each other: "where Clinton's lies have been those of self-protection and survival, Gore's have by and large been ones of self-aggrandizement and glorification." Though Turque thinks that Gore's are lesser transgressions, putting it this way actually makes them sound worse. But although inexpedient, it's not clear that gilding the lily as Gore has done is really all that different from what most politicians try to pull off when boasting of their accomplishments.

Turque is at his most interesting in discussing Gore's deep distrust of the advisers Clinton had clustered around him. Gore saw them as loose-lipped and disloyal, which has turned out to be pretty much right. Gore was also exasperated by the administration's early fecklessness on foreign policy. According to Turque, he pushed Clinton to launch a retaliatory attack against Baghdad for trying to assassinate George Bush when he visited Kuwait and also took a tough line on the Balkans. Perhaps Gore's most significant efforts have come with establishment of bilateral commissions with Ukraine and Russia. "Gore's diplomacy persuaded Ukrainian officials to return to Russia the remnants of the nuclear missile arsenal in its possession." On domestic policy, Gore was crucial in getting Clinton to sign on to welfare reform and he pushed for the "reinvention of government" which, while not an unqualified success, resulted in the Federal Acquisition Streamlining Act of 1994.

As president, Gore would be in a position to pursue the policies already laid out by the Clinton administration. While he does not possess Clinton's rhetorical skills, he will be a much harder target for the right to assail. Now that the attempt to destroy Clinton has sputtered out and Gore looks like he may well win the presidency, conservatives will realize that in part they really were right. Clinton *was* a devilish opponent. He has positioned the Democrats to control the White House for another eight years. ●

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Avoiding the Triangulation Trap

Reforming liberalism without abandoning it

By Stephen Pomper

KENNETH BAER'S *Reinventing Democrats* IS A history of the Democratic Leadership Council written with the detached objectivity of a hometown sports columnist covering the local team in a pennant race. The DLC (they're the home team) was formed in the mid-1980s by a group of reform-minded Democrats hoping to resurrect the Party after two crushing defeats by the Reagan juggernaut. Since then, the Party has been transformed from the Party of McGovern—associated with peaceniks and radicals, free-flowing entitlements, and unwieldy bureaucracy—to the Party of Clinton—the man who presided over welfare reform and declared that "the era of big government is over." Baer wants to credit the DLC (and its "New Democrat" followers) for recognizing that the Democrats' McGovern-era politics "repelled the working class and middle class voters who were once at the heart of the [Democratic] coalition" and for having the vision, tenacity, and political smarts to change the Party's course.

REINVENTING DEMOCRATS
The Politics of Liberalism from Reagan to Clinton
By Kenneth Baer
University Press of Kansas, $29.95

Despite Baer's evident sympathies, *Reinventing Democrats* is a detailed, accessible, and useful account of how an important political institution made friends and influenced people. But the book is a lot less appealing when it goes after the opposition—not the GOP, but the old liberal wing of the Party. Baer tends to hit the liberals in spots where the DLC ought to be a bit sensitive itself. And in suggesting that the Party cast off its liberal heritage, Baer fails to acknowledge the presence in that tradition of certain core values worth retaining.

Game Plan

If you imagine the DLC as a team, then the captain would have to be Al From. A veteran of the Carter administration, From took over the House Democratic Caucus after the 1980 elections with visions of rejuvenating his ailing party. He had some natural allies. As Baer points out, there were at least three strains of Democratic pols who felt the party needed redirection—Southern Democrats like Sen. Sam Nunn and Sen. Lawton Chiles, neoconservatives like Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, and neoliberals like Rep. Tim Wirth and Sen. Gary Hart. Although they came to their views from different angles, they wound up agreeing on many of the same positions: They believed that the Democratic Party should be tougher on crime and foreign policy, less spendthrift with entitlements, and less indulgent of entrenched special interests like civil servants and unions. They also thought that moving the party in this direction would "restore its electoral viability" with the middle class that had deserted it for Ronald Reagan.

How did a group of elite politicians and operatives transform a political party?

First, they gave themselves a little bit of distance. After several unsuccessful attempts to influence the party establishment from within, the reformers formed the DLC as an extra-party organization in 1985. This avoided what Bruce Babbitt referred to as the "Noah's Ark problem"—the need to satisfy diverse constituents by taking representative positions on behalf of each one. They could also raise their own money (which DLC honchos like Virginia's Chuck Robb were notably good at), start their own think tank (the Progressive Policy Institute), and publicize their own views without tangling with the cumbersome Party bureaucracy.

Second, they worked the rules. They pressured the party to create a new class of "super delegates" consisting of state party leaders and elected officials who, they hoped, would balance out the interest groups that had come to dominate Democratic conventions. They also lobbied to cluster Southern and Western state primaries on "Super Tuesday," so that candidates who were strong in that part of the country (especially conservative Southern Democrats) would get an early boost that could offset a poor showing in more liberal Iowa or New Hampshire.

Third, they aimed for the top. After the

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Dukakis/Bentsen defeat in 1988, the DLC decided to groom their own hand-picked candidate for the White House. Baer reports that in 1989 Al From flew to Little Rock and told then Governor Bill Clinton: "Have I got a deal for you... If you take the DLC Chairmanship, we will give you a national platform, and I think you will be President of the United States."

And finally, they squawked when Clinton strayed. Baer describes the rising fury within the DLC when Clinton spent his early political capital on "Old Democrat" issues like gays in the military, Lani Guinier, and universal health care. After the disastrous 1994 elections, Dave McCurdy (an Oklahoma congressman who had lost his job) denounced Clinton as a "transitional figure" and PPI began working on a "Third Way Project" that might be the basis for a third-party movement. An embattled Clinton mended the fence by "triangulating" toward more conservative positions and pushing ahead on welfare reform—and by the 1996 elections, the DLC was confident they had him back in the fold.

Baer sometimes strains to make the DLC look like the secret of Clinton's success—and indeed he never convincingly puts to rest the suspicion that it was the other way around. But this does not keep the strategic summary from being an insightful look at the organization's motivations and methods.

Double Standard

The bigger problem for *Reinventing Democrats* stems from the way in which Baer attacks both liberals and liberalism. As a DLC partisan, Baer wants us to believe that the New Democrats have identified the way forward. This leads him to go after the old guard in a manner that is neither evenhanded nor especially thoughtful.

Baer is most glaringly unfair in his discussion of special interest money. He is highly critical of the influence this money has on the left and almost entirely blind to it on the right. For example, in lamenting that liberal organizations like the AFL-CIO and Sierra Club successfully lobbied against the extension of President Clinton's fast track free trade powers, Baer notes that, "New Democrats were disheartened as even some of their own... succumbed to the pressure of labor's deep pockets and opposed the extension."

Yet while he's happy to suggest that big labor bought and paid for the fast track vote, Baer doesn't so much as acknowledge the influence of big corporate and other right-wing money on American politics. He blames the failure of the 1993 health-care reforms on strategic miscalculations by the Clinton administration without even a reference to the millions of dollars that the health-care industry poured into the Harry and Louise ads that soured the public on Clinton's plan. And he refuses to meaningfully address criticism of the DLC for a convention sponsored by, among others, tobacco giants RJR Nabisco and Phillip Morris. He simply notes that the DLC had always had "elite—corporate and private—donors" and that "in a polarized environment... this facet of the organization was particularly objectionable to liberals." Somehow the liberals get blamed again.

Not Ready to Say Goodbye

But the bottom-line question for many Democrats will be how enthusiastically to embrace Baer's soaring conclusion that with each electoral victory for the New Democrats, it will be "harder and harder to return to the liberalism that preceded it." To some extent this is a definitional question: If by liberalism Baer refers to the flawed and often counter-productive prejudices, hypocrisies, and interest group politics that characterized the Party from the late 1960s through the mid-1980s, then his conclusion is not especially troubling. But if by liberalism Baer refers to the conviction that there is a strong role for the federal government in promoting equality in American society, then it becomes more disconcerting.

To be sure, liberals themselves have debated what sort of equality the government should promote. Mainstream liberals have tended to believe that government should be an agent for wealth redistribution—with liberals in the 1930s leaning towards something approaching full redistribution and those in the 1960s tending to embrace more modest wealth shifting along the lines accomplished through welfare. By contrast, starting in the 1970s, neoliberals (including Mickey Kaus and other editors of this magazine) turned the emphasis away from wealth shifting and argued that the government should instead focus on developing a network of civic institutions to support a more socially egalitarian society—one where Americans would have both greater opportunity through economic mobility and the capacity to lead meaningful lives regardless of their material resources.

During the 1970s and 1980s, neoliberal writers developed a platform that served this agenda in a series of articles that appeared in these pages.[1] The platform was an ideological mixed bag, with proposals that were in some cases considerably to the right, and in others considerably to the left, of mainstream liberalism. Because many of these views wound up in the DLC's platform, they merit a moment's examination.

[1]This platform was summarized in "A Platform for the Seventies" (October 1974), "A Platform for the Nineteen-Eighties" (February 1979), and "A Neoliberal's Manifesto" (May 1983).

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The neoliberal "conservative" positions included proposals that would make it easier to hold federal bureaucrats and teachers accountable for underperformance, supported tough prison sentences for violent offenders, advocated military spending for critical weapons systems, and encouraged entrepreneurship. The neoliberals argued that mainstream liberal positions on these issues often had sympathetic foundations, but failed to address major problems the country was facing: Liberal sympathies for affirmative government led them to resist desperately needed bureaucratic reform; a concern for public education led them to support teachers' unions that blocked entry to non-union talent and hurt the public schools; empathy for Jean ValJean led them to ignore the real dangers posed by violent offenders and to underplay the distinction between violent and non-violent crime (an oversight that continues to contribute to prison overcrowding); memories of Vietnam caused them to oppose military spending that was vital to national security; and the knowledge of corporate misdeeds kept them from supporting entrepreneurship despite the fundamental importance of a prosperous private sector.

At the same time, however, the neoliberals supported institution-building proposals that were well to the left of mainstream liberal positions. In the case of health care, this magazine called for the creation of a national health service that would free doctors to focus on treating patients rather than collecting insurance claims, and free patients from the anxiety of medical expenses. Another neoliberal proposal with strongly socialist overtones was to create a compulsory national service, where people from different classes would mix, learn from each other, and develop a sense of civic responsibility. The neoliberals also continued to believe that strong federal regulation of everything from drugs to aviation was needed to protect the public—although they reserved the right to criticize the regulatory agencies for falling down on the job.

While the neoliberal platform was therefore ideologically diversified, it was not a compromise position between the political right and the political left. Planks on the right were intended to reform and strengthen government and society, and positions on the left were intended to create the network that neoliberals felt was needed to support the egalitarian society they envisaged. Taken together, the planks served the core neoliberal values of "community, democracy, and prosperity."

Half a Mansion

Now compare the neoliberal platform to the New Democratic "public philosophy" that Baer describes.

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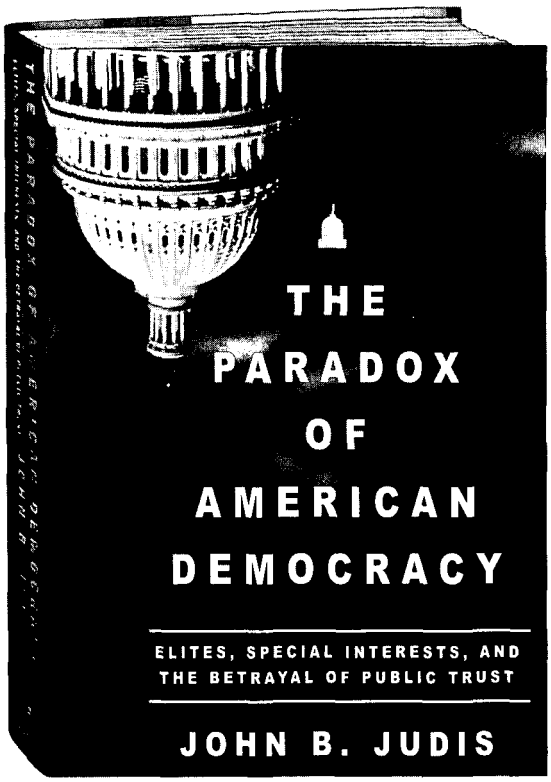

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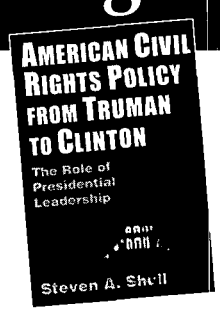
Do they share the same goals and values? Certainly, the language of "opportunity, responsibility, and community" that Clinton and the DLC have promoted resonates with the neoliberal values of the 1980s. And certainly many of the planks in the DLC platform, and policies that have been implemented—from reinventing government, to the administration's pro-growth economic policies, to welfare reform—have a clear neoliberal heritage. But what about the institutions that the neoliberal platform was committed to building and the governmental role that it continued to support?

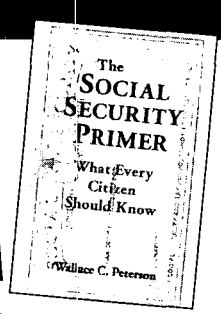
Here, the New Democrats may be less than fully committed. The DLC's line on health care has been decisively incremental. Baer treats the establishment of the Corporation for National Service (which sponsors the Americorps volunteer program that employs roughly 40,000 people) as satisfying the DLC's commitment to national service—even though its far more expansive original plan was to require service as a condition to receiving student loans. In the area of welfare reform, the DLC has failed to provide leadership on the kinds of supports—from job training to enriching childcare—that welfare-to-work participants will need in order to succeed.

The fact is the DLC has "triangulated" towards a more skeptical view of the federal government in the eight years of the Clinton Administration. Baer says that this is in part "born out of the belief that the Information Age, with its global, information-based economy, has made centralized bureaucratic structures obsolete." That's only true if the decentralized bureaucracies and market mechanisms at the receiving end of all this information actually fill the social needs that have to be met. And a quick glance at the nation's decentralized education and childcare systems suggests that we can't yet count on them to do that.

At the end of the day, it's hard to believe that the DLC's commitment to "opportunity, responsibility, and community" is complete without a strong commitment to the public institutions that will be necessary to make equality of opportunity a realistic possibility. The public philosophy that Baer describes may comprise many worthy ideas but it is lacking in that crucial respect. And that's one reason why all Democrats—New and Old—should think about keeping their good friend liberalism around for just a while longer. 1

Policy, Programs, Leaders ...





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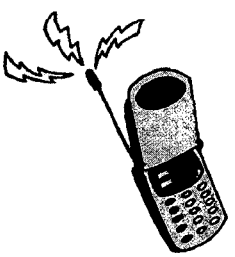
Tidbits & Outrages

Keepin' 'em down in the Delta

A bill introduced in the Mississippi legislature in January would make it illegal for a male customer in a strip club to have an erection, even if entirely clothed.

What do you mean, you don't want the wafer?!?

Last month it became legal for Kentucky ministers and church officers to carry guns inside their houses of worship, as long as they have concealed weapons permits.



Redefining the Happy Meal

Cyros International Sperm Bank Ltd., a Danish sperm bank, is marketing itself as "the McDonald's of sperm," according to a Wall Street Journal *article. Cyros currently exports sperm to 25 countries.*

They saw it coming

In late February, the New York City Human Resources Administration ended a program that had provided at least 15 welfare recipients with training as psychics in an effort to move them off the rolls. The Psychic Network pays "workfare" recipients $10 an hour after completing the training program offered through the city agency. The program was canceled after a *New York Times* article revealed its existence

Ted Koppel shouldn't try it.

A new late night Russian TV news program has been causing controversy. The news anchor, Svetlana Pissotskaya, delivers the days events while stripping off her clothing, occasionally assisted by a producer, whose disembodied hands are seen unbuttoning her shirt or jacket.

Madonna wants to have his child

A new German rock star, a completely computer generated image named E-Cyas, has recently released a successful single, to rave reviews, that cracked the top 100.

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Political Booknotes

Street Life

By Amy Waldman

SIDEWALK EXAMINES HOW societies and subcultures form and regulate themselves. It explores and explains the life of cities, from how public space is controlled, both formally and informally, to how local laws get made and why they get broken. It tells a story—dozens of stories—about how people relate across boundaries of race and class and experience.

SIDEWALK
by Mitchell Duneier
Farrar, Straus & Giroux, $27.00

It does all of this simply by probing very, very deeply into the world of a small group of men, most of whom are black, that has adopted a stretch of sidewalk in Greenwich Village. There, depending on their proclivities and ambitions, they sell books, magazines, or secondhand goods, or guard the tables or spaces of those who sell, or panhandle, or in some cases, sleep. These are men, one of whom, Hakim Hasan, writes in an afterword to *Sidewalk*, whose identities "are hidden in public space."

Some of the men in the Village are ex-convicts, for whom the street means a fresh start; others are ex-corporate men, for whom it means liberation. Some of the men are "unhoused," in Mitchell Duneier's preferred term, while others go home to apartments each night. Some are intellectuals selling books specifically about the black experience; others subsist by charging those vendors money to guard their spaces overnight. Some get up and go to work each day; others, occasionally unhinged by drugs or alcohol, live less predictably.

What is significant is that, in one form or another, all of them work as entrepreneurs in the informal economy, and as such, their stories are a tribute to the redemptive, stabilizing, power of work. And what is surprising is how the men have constituted a strangely nurturing network in which newcomers are taught to scavenge and sell by old-timers; rules about social behavior are as much enforced within the group as from outside; and conduct is shaped by a combination of logic, integrity, anger, and the drive for respect.

For them, the sidewalk has become a sustaining habitat, but they do not exist in a vacuum. Some of their small social transgressions, from peeing in public places, to harassing women and bank-goers, to drinking, make many urban dwellers, including some who live in the neighborhood, just wish they would go away. Under Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani, they have borne the brunt of quality-of-life policing.

The essential question running through the book is whether these men are "public characters" or "broken windows." The term "public character" comes from Jane Jacobs' 1961 classic, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, a study of city life based largely in Greenwich Village. Jacobs laid out the concept of "public characters"—those, such as shopkeepers, who serve as benevolent conduits of information and "eyes on the street." When Duneier first meets Hasan, the book vendor who serves as his initial guide, he describes himself as a "public character."

The term "broken window" comes from a theory originally advanced by James Q. Wilson and George Kelling and adopted by elected officials and police chiefs across the country—that to leave behaviors like minor vandalism unchecked leads to more serious crime. Duneier points out that the theory has subsequently been broadened to refer to social behaviors like panhandling.

Duneier concludes that the larger community does not necessarily see the men as public characters. To understand why that is, he spends much of his book examining the barriers of race, class, culture, and behavior that have shaped the relationships between local businesspeople and residents and the vendors.

By the end, he has identified a central contradiction that the city's policies miss: "Many of the men who are succeeding in living a 'better' life through their entrepreneurial activity are panhandlers, drunks, addicts, loiterers, and possibly the mentally disturbed, as well as unlicensed vendors."

He continues: "The men working on Sixth Avenue may be viewed as broken windows, but this research shows that most of them have actually become public characters who create a set of expectations, for one another and strangers (including the criminal element—as, indeed, many of them once were), that 'someone cares' and that they should strive to live better lives."

In other words, to drive them off the street and away from their livelihoods is far more likely to cause crime than allowing them to exist on the street.

"Tearing down the informal structure carries with it the cost of eradicating positive and inspiring models that are misunderstood for their opposite," Duneier concludes. And the misunderstanding, he argues, results from judging these men simply on the basis of race and class.

Before that conclusion come innumerable rich observations and details. To describe Duneier as obsessed would be an understatement: He spent several years reporting and writing a publication-ready book based on Mr. Hasan, then decided, with Mr. Hasan's urging, that he needed to look at the wider network of vendors on the street, scrapped the original book, went back to the street, worked for magazine vendors, and wrote something new.

He has a relentlessly curious mind—not to mention far better fact-checking skills than most journalists—and, accordingly, *Sidewalk* ranges far, and rewardingly, from Sixth Avenue, where the men are concentrated.

Duneier tracks down the city councilman who, almost on a fluke, sponsored an ordinance allowing the sale of written material on the streets of New York, which became the men's livelihood. (That same councilman later becomes a lobbyist for business interests and helps pass a law that cuts the space allowed for vending in half, leading to all sorts of fights on the street.) Curious about how the men learned about the ordinance, Duneier discovers that it was the policemen who enforce the law on

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the streets who passed on—sometimes in garbled form—information about what was now legal and why. He travels to Penn Station, the former habitat for many of the men, to explore how they were literally squeezed out by architectural modifications that deliberately eliminated the spaces where they had gathered.

But mostly, he spends time with the men, observing, interviewing, tape recording, having them tape each other. The book, as a result, often feels like a documentary. The men argue over space, instruct each other on what prices to demand, haggle with customers, harass women, and the like.

Duneier tries to understand why some of the men persist in behaviors, despite the efforts of both society at large and their fellow vendors to reform them. He makes a powerful case that antisocial behavior is often a reaction to a lack of sociability on the part of local businesses and residents.

Consider, for example, the way many of the men pee in the street, in courtyards of buildings, even in cups that they store on a tree. The men do so because they believe that they are not welcome in local restaurants; and public bathrooms are located at such a distance that, to use them, the men must leave their goods untended on the street, where they are likely to be confiscated by the police.

Duneier describes a white Vermont family that comes each year to sell Christmas trees in the Village. They have been embraced by local residents and businesses, given keys to their apartments, invited in to shower, and so on—generosities that have never been extended to the vendors. The difference is not exclusively race, Duneier notes, but that is certainly part of it. Whatever the reasons, the result is that the family members do not have to relieve themselves in cups or on the street. Duneier also aptly points out the usual double standards: A homeless black man peeing on the street is a transgressor; a drunk upper class white man who does so is drunk, and thus forgiven.

The term "humanize" is overused, but it is worth using here only because of the way Duneier accomplishes it—not only by making invisible lives visible, but also by showing the commonalities between these men and those with less pigmentation and more money. Their haggling over prices, for example, is as much about the preservation of "respect"—feeling that no one "got over" on them—as about the money. No different, it seems, from many businessmen.

The only criticism of Duneier is, perhaps, an excess of idealism, or liberalism; in his hope that local residents and businesspeople can somehow overlook the behaviors they do not like in order to focus on the fact that the men are working. Duneier is too optimistic and he may also be asking too much of the neighborhood. For example, shouldn't a woman feel she can walk down the street of her neighborhood and not be harassed?

Still, that is only a small quibble with a remarkable book that brings urban life, and the hidden webs that give structure to it, into focus. These men may be perceived as the weakest among us, but if *Sidewalk* is any indication, their resilience, and spirit, is more powerful than the drive to eliminate them from view.

AMY WALDMAN *is a reporter for* The New York Times.

THE LAST GREAT REVOLUTION
Turmoil and Transformation in Iran
by Robin Wright
Knopf, $27.50

The New Iran

By Andrew Cockburn

COINCIDING WITH THE RECENT triumph of reformers in the Iranian parliamentary elections, Robin Wright's depressingly titled book (are there really to be no more great revolutions?) is timely indeed. With impressive diligence she conducts us on a brisk trot round the modern Iranian social landscape, especially that part of it inhabited by enlightened reformers. The result is instructive and important to Americans reared on a media diet of fanatical mullahs preaching jihad to chanting masses.

Wright excels in the personal story—plunging into street demonstrations to elicit the life histories of youthful participants, dropping by a family-planning clinic to monitor young couples discussing sex, interviewing former revolutionaries, museum guards, carpet sellers, journalists, and many more, with impressive energy. At times I felt exhausted by her sheer industry. Her discussions with the liberal Islamic scholar Abdul Karim Soroush, one of the bravest and most interesting figures of contemporary Iran, as well as the redoubtable politician Ataollah Mohajerani, are particularly interesting.

Her conclusion is simple and hard to quarrel with: The Islamic revolution in Iran is reforming itself, struggling free of the suffocating embrace of the religious tyranny imposed by Khomeini after the overthrow of the Shah. The men (and, to a lesser but still surprising extent, women) now taking power are, she makes clear, intent on improving relations with the United States.

I hope Wright's book will be closely studied in Washington, where the Iranian "threat" is apparently still taken seriously in some quarters. Iran's missile program is, for example, customarily invoked as justification for the missile defense boondoggle, while the administration goes to enormous lengths to ensure that Caspian oil will not be routed, as the oil companies would prefer, through Iran, but rather through war-torn states of the former Soviet Union. Since there are so very few threats to go round in today's world, it may be some time before the national security establishment can tear itself away from the useful specter of militant ayatollahs.

In fact, Iran was never much of a threat in the first place. When our friend the Shah was overthrown by his enraged subjects, who went on to indicate in the hostage crisis that they had their beefs against the United States, threatmongers had us trembling in our beds at the prospect of militant Islam sweeping out of the desert sands and menacing Western civilization as we know it. Yet the Iranian revolution was principally an uprising against the secular modernism of the Shah's regime that had signally failed to promote social justice in Iran. Whatever Ayatollah Khomeini may have hoped, it had little export potential.

The theocracy espoused by Khomeini was a novel perversion even of Shia Islam, let alone the Sunni variant

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to which the vast majority of Muslims in the Middle East and elsewhere adhere. "Velyat e Faqih," the notion of a religious leader holding supreme political power, was given a very sniffy reception by theologically more eminent Shia figures, such as Grand Ayatollah al-Khoie, venerated religious leader of the 12 million Iraqi Shia. Thus, when Khomeini reached out to subvert his Iraqi co-religionists soon after taking power, few of them heeded his call. In fact, the Iraqi Shia fought tenaciously for Saddam Hussein against the Iranians over eight bloody years. The Shia of Saudi Arabia never posed much of a threat to the monarchy and were eventually bought off.

Further afield, the triumph of the revolution in Iran may have appeared to have found echoes in other Muslim countries with the appearance of fanatical groups pledged to "renewal" of their faith by returning to the alleged purity of seventh-century Islam. As in Khomeini's Iran, this involved adopting as dogma the most intolerant of the Prophet's revelations—chopping off the hands of thieves, subjugation of women, etc. But such movements have rarely successfully taken power, and where Islamic states have appeared they have not served as models to others. Today, apart from Iran, the sum total of successful fundamentalist Islamic revolutions consists of Sudan and Afghanistan, hardly an advertisement for the model.

Admittedly, there are places where militant Islam still appears to flourish. In Indonesia, for example, a Muslim leader recently told a hundred thousand demonstrators in Jakarta that "tolerance is absurd," sparking a massacre of Christians. Nigeria is convulsed by riots and massacres following attempts to impose Islamic "sharia" law. Pakistan, where the military rulers have followed Koranic precepts in banning interest on bank loans, may yet fall victim to a corrosive fundamentalism. Nevertheless, the overall picture is that of a movement in retreat, most tellingly in the place where it all started: Iran.

Just as Khomeini's revolution was propelled by disaffection with the poverty and social injustice associated with the Shah's corrupt rule, so his successors have suffered from their failure to alleviate poverty and their own very evident dishonesty. On my last trip to Iran I found this to be the dominant topic of conversation across the country: "Prices keep rising, wages stay where they are. The mullahs are corrupt. There's no freedom here." Not surprisingly, the mullahs' failure has led to a gradual loss of interest in Islam itself. It is rare for example to see people stopping to pray in public places, a common sight in supposedly secular states like Turkey.

For a time, it appeared that Khomeini's hard-line heirs would not give up their power without a fight. Liberal student demonstrations were brutally broken up; a death squad operating from within the intelligence service began killing prominent reformist intellectuals. It is therefore all the more cheering that, in the end, the Iranian revolution appears to be reforming itself peacefully, a fact that provides the central thesis of Wright's book and has been notably confirmed by the recent elections. As she concludes: "The Islamic Republic does deserve credit for one of the twentieth century's most important legacies. In ways never anticipated, Iran's upheaval did succeed in creating a climate for revolutions within the revolution." Maybe Khomeini had his points after all.

ANDREW COCKBURN's *most recent book is* Out of the Ashes; The Resurrection of Saddam Hussein.

The Wright Stuff

By John B. Judis

FOR THE FIRST HALF OF THIS century, if not longer, to be an intellectual meant to be concerned with the meaning of life and history. Darwin, Freud, and Marx loomed large. Today, there seems to be little search for transcendence, and the meaning of history has become a question of whether the Dow will break 35,000. Robert Wright is a notable exception to these trends. As I learned when we were colleagues at *The New Republic* five years ago, he is interested in, even obsessed with, the big questions. His last book, *The Moral Animal*, was about the nature of humanity: how our animal pasts still live within us, not only as the lascivious and murderous id, but as impetus to what Wright called "reciprocal altruism." His new book, *Nonzero*, is even more ambitious. It is about whether history has a direction. It is a more difficult read than *The Moral Animal*, but it is well worth it. I am not qualified to comment on Wright's biological speculations, but I can say that his theory of history is defensible and provocative, and as far as I can tell, a genuine advance in our understanding of how we came to be, and where we are headed.

NONZERO:
The Logic of Human Destiny
by Robert Wright
Pantheon, $27.50

The attempt to devise a purely secular theory of history dates from Vico's cyclical *New Science of History* in 1725, but the attempt to envision history as a progressive succession of stages dates from Hegel's *Philosophy of History* in 1830. Hegel envisaged history as the unfolding of a world-spirit, divided within itself and in conflict through time, until mankind reached a point where consciousness, embodied in man, could achieve freedom through mastery of itself and nature. Marx put Hegel's theory in materialist terms: history, driven by class struggle and revolution, would lead finally, through the technological subjugation of nature, to a prosperous society in which human beings would no longer be divided into classes and thrown into war and revolution, but would control their own destiny. They would be truly free. Marx's vision of communism was fanciful, but his and Hegel's theory of history as stages of progress triggered often unwittingly by war and revolution has not been superseded.

Since Marx and Hegel, political philosophers from Spencer and Croce to Lenin and Spengler produced variations of these early theories, but after World War II, the effort was largely abandoned because it became identified with the nightmares of Nazism and Stalinism. Instead, the study of history became confined to eras and regimes—and later to the micro-exploration of social trends and fashions. As Wright explains, a similar development overtook anthropology: once the study of cultural evolution, it became the study of discrete cultures that existed on a purely horizontal and

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Wright's work is an attempt to return to Hegel and Marx's progressive theory of history by drawing upon a dissident school of cultural anthropology and the work of evolutionary biologists, like Richard Dawkins, who have tried to extend the principles of natural selection to history. Wright employs the notion of a "non-zero-sum game" to explain his theory of history. In a zero-sum game, one contestant can only succeed on the basis of another's failure. In a non-zero-sum game, both parties can succeed or fail together. War is a zero-sum game, but commerce is, or can be (if one person is not cheated by another) a non-zero-sum game. Wright argues that human beings have been driven toward more complex forms of social organization and eventually away from imperial domination and war by the progressive adoption of non-zero-sum games. Sometimes, the impetus for such change has been war itself, which forces people to learn cooperation for their own defense. Sometimes, the impetus is the struggle for economic survival and betterment through the collective application of tools and technology. Just as natural selection favors certain genes over others, leading to the triumph of our large-brained species, its equivalent in history favors non-zero-sum games that lead to greater prosperity and social interdependence.

Wright's dialectic, like Marx's, pivots on an irony. Blind struggle leads finally to enlightenment and freedom. "Greed and the lust for status, for power over people, helped drive a technological evolution that granted people more freedom," Wright concludes. But where Marx and Spencer emphasized progress through the subjugation of inferior by superior peoples, Wright emphasizes the revolutionary impact of writing and the printing press on the acceleration of history and the spread of interdependence. Wright borrows from Dawkins in *The Selfish Gene* the concept of a meme—a unit of knowledge analogous to a gene—whose diffusion depends on its utility to human survival. By this analysis,

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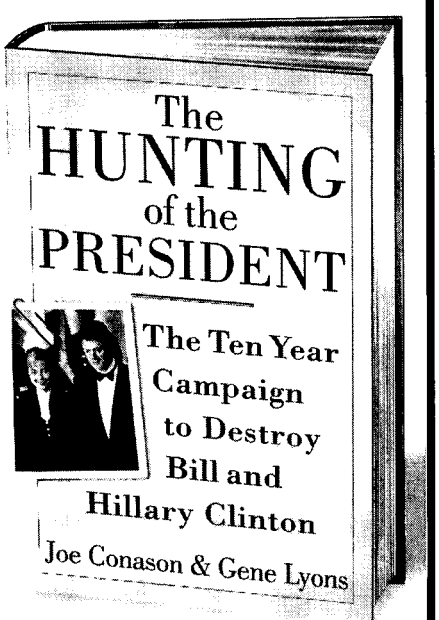

THOMAS DUNNE BOOKS St. Martin's Press

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understanding. Ancient Athens is often pictured as a zenith of civilization, but the Greeks of Pericles and Sophocles saw non-Greeks as being less than human and didn't hesitate to enslave or indiscriminately slaughter foreigners. The spread of global commerce brings a growing recognition of a common humanity. "You simply cannot do business with people while executing all their male citizens, and increasingly we do business with people everywhere," Wright writes. "In fully modern society, people now acknowledge, in principle at least, that out people are people, too." Wright applauds as well the move toward global kinds of political and economic cooperation, from the United Nations to the World Trade Organization.

Wright concludes *Nonzero* with a discussion of theology, which I find the least impressive or persuasive part of the book. It is filled with the kind of analysis (for instance, about the "seeming superfluousness of consciousness") that once led Ludwig Wittgenstein to describe metaphysics as "language gone on a holiday." The fact that history has evolved in a certain direction—and a direction in which we can take a certain pride or pleasure—is no more evidence of a supernatural cause than the existence of gravity. Wright would deny it, but his speculations are a variation on William Paley's argument that if history, like the watch, has a design and structure, then someone must have designed and structured it. Fortunately, there is an answer to this question that doesn't require the invocation of the supernatural: We—the sorry mass of humanity—have made history, but we have often proceeded blindly and without the least understanding of the great project in which we are engaged. Wright should be content that he has described, better than anyone in recent days, the nature and scope of that endeavor.

JOHN B. JUDIS *is a senior editor at* The New Republic. *His most recent book is* The Paradox of American Democracy.

Funding Freedom

By Aryeh Neier

THE PROMOTION OF DEMOCRACY worldwide was articulated as a goal of American foreign policy in a June 8, 1982 address by President Reagan to the British Parliament. Reagan's espousal of this cause had an opportunistic element. At the time, his Administration was preoccupied with developments in Central America where it had "drawn the line" (in Secretary of State Alexander Haig's words) in El Salvador by assisting the armed forces there to fend off a leftist insurgency while covertly organizing a rightist insurgency to topple the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua. Reagan encountered resistance in Congress to providing the funds he sought for the Salvadoran war because of accounts by human rights groups and the media of severe abuses by the military there, including massacres of peasants and thousands of death-squad killings. Some in Congress also attempted to obstruct Reagan's war in Nicaragua. Though the Sandinistas persecuted political dissenters and harassed an opposition newspaper, their rule was not so bloody as in nearby El Salvador.

AIDING DEMOCRACY ABROAD:
The Learning Curve
by Thomas Carothers
The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, $39.95

In an attempt to make the case that the human-rights situation was actually worse in Nicaragua, Reagan focused on political developments. The Sandinistas had deferred elections until 1985, six years after they seized power. In contrast, El Salvador had just held elections for its National Assembly that produced televised images of long lines of people in the sun waiting their turn to vote. President Reagan told the British that Salvadorans "braved ambush and gunfire, trudging miles to vote for freedom." Equating human rights with elections, Reagan committed the United States to a global effort to promote democracy. "What I am describing now is a plan and a hope for the long term," the President said, "the march of freedom and democracy which will leave Marxism-Leninism on the ash heap of history."

As Thomas Carothers—who is Vice President of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and widely recognized as the most serious student of foreign-aid programs promoting democracy—shows us, the promotion of democracy has since become an enduring feature of America's role in the world and President Reagan's stress on elections has remained prominent. It produced the establishment of such bodies as the National Democratic Institute, the International Republican Institute and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, ostensibly private bodies nevertheless paid for by tax dollars. These groups play a key role in promoting free elections —which is one of three elements that form what Carothers calls the "democratic template" employed by the United States. The two other elements are American-style federalism and separation of powers, and support for "civil society" through non-governmental organizations that promote social and environmental causes, labor unions, and independent media.

Though Carothers is frequently critical of the ways this agenda is carried out, he avoids sweeping indictments or proposals. Mostly, he limits himself to sensible observations about how things could be improved. He wants programs developed with a better grasp of local context, with less reliance on expensive intermediaries, with less political interference by U.S. ambassadors, with greater recognition that building democracy is a long-term process, with greater reliance on local responsibility and, above all, with more modest expectations.

This is a far cry from Reagan's crusade. It is, however, more realistic. Although walking miles and standing in line in the sun to cast ballots is a moving tribute to the people's thirst for democracy, building it requires a lot more than simply organizing an election.

ARYEH NEIER *is president of the Open Society Institute.*

Market Failure

By Theodore Marmor

RICHARD EPSTEIN IS AN IDEOlogical zealot who writes clearly and a devotee of 19th-century classic liberalism who thinks a one-size-fits-all philosophy is adequate for every and any subject. In the case of

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Mortal Peril, which will soon be released in paperback, and which his publishers hope will create a stir in a renewed debate, the victim is medical care: a subject more resistant than most to an ideological straightjacket.

MORTAL PERIL
Our Inalienable Right To Health Care?
by Richard Epstein
Perseus, $18.00

Epstein begins by going to extraordinary lengths to argue that citizens should not enjoy the right to medical care. He believes in the centrality of property rights and the virtues of allocating any good or service by willingness and ability to pay, nor does he grant any exceptional status to health, illness, or medical care. In his words, the "major question is: Why is this principle [of equal access] appropriate for health care when it has been rejected for vacation homes and fast cars?" From here, Epstein goes on to criticize the notion of a positive right to medical care as not only philosophically questionable, but economically inefficient and administratively impossible. He questions whether medical care is all that important for health and argues that economic growth (and wealth) explains most of the improvements we foolishly ascribe to modern medicine.

Having made that set of claims, *Mortal Peril* then takes a tour across the vast domain of American medical care. Medicare, he finds foolish. The Clinton health reform plan he regards as idiotic. And the utilitarian and contract enforcing claims he makes for active euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide are not very different from the case for selling body organs. What links these views is the claim that we own our own bodies and that markets (and contracts) are devices of "voluntary exchange" by which the "greatest good for the greatest number" is achieved when supported by the willingness to recognize and enforce contracts. Although no one else has so boldly presented Epstein's utilitarian premises, the clarity of his presentation has the countervailing result: it makes the flaws in his prescriptions and scholarly standards obvious.

The fundamental flaw is that the evidentiary basis of this book is that of a legal brief. To take the area I know the best, Medicare, one clearly sees the triumph of ideological conviction over serious scholarship. To understand the origins and operation of the Medicare program, Epstein relies for intellectual authority on three main, ideologically-transparent sources: *Reason* magazine, The Cato Institute, and the Heritage Foundation. This is a bit like going to a brothel to discuss the merits of chastity. Unsurprisingly, Epstein concludes that Medicare—and its commitment to social insurance—does not allocate services as a competitive market would. But, after all, Medicare was created to ensure access to medical care for the elderly by removing it from the market. To criticize the inefficiencies of non-market allocation without addressing the core issue of fair access begs the question.

Epstein also overgeneralizes in his attack on public programs. "Government programs" like Social Security and Medicare, we are blithely told on page three, "are organized Ponzi operations that eventually go broke by using the capital of later contributors to satisfy the obligations to earlier plan participants." With equal aplomb, Epstein decries medical systems like Medicare that pour "huge sums of money... into

WHY AMERICANS AREN'T VOTING.
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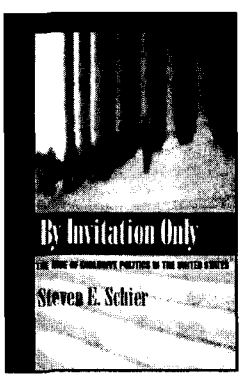

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Steven E. Schier

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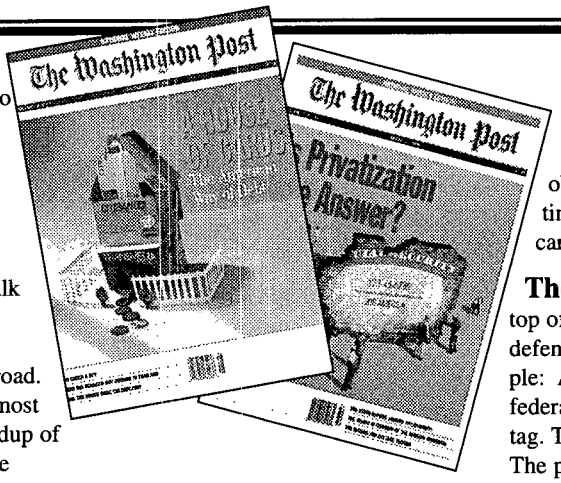

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the last weeks and days of life, money that would do far more for the health of the nation if left in the pockets of young parents to spend on the nutrition and education of their children."

Medicare now draws about 1.45 percent of the paycheck of every worker in the U.S. (and an equal sum from the employer). As with any system of social insurance, small proportions of the wages of large numbers of citizens add up. But not only is it unfair to criticize excessive spending on the last days of life (doctors don't know who is going to die and who isn't) there is no shred of evidence that the repeal of Medicare would enhance the health of America's children. In fact, those seeking to cut Medicare have often had long knives out for child health programs, as shown by the efforts of Republicans in 1995 to cut both Medicare and Medicaid (which is a major provider of health care for poor children).

Epstein also allows simple error to masquerade as serious commentary. He laments the "lumbering structure and bureaucratic incentives" of government medical-care programs, generalizing beyond reason. He is sure that government health insurance "chews up huge portions of its revenues in administrative expenses and loses another significant proportion to fraud and abuse at every level of its operation." This claim is palpably false; Medicare, for instance, is much less costly administratively than private health insurance, spending one to three percent on administration compared with 10-15 percent for private health insurance. (Indeed, there is a good argument that Medicare—and government health programs of the OECD in general—should spend somewhat more on administration so as to reduce fraud, waste, and abuse.) There is simply no comparative scholarship that supports the contention that, among industrial democracies, the public medical sector is the wasteland and the private sector the prudent consumer of administrative dollars. One need only look to the scandals involving Columbia/HCA and Blue Cross in recent years to question Epstein's dogmatic assertion that the government is uniquely wasteful and subject to fraud in its spending of health-care dollars.

To his credit, Epstein does show a keen sense of the difference between an academic intellectual and a serious manager in an industry like health care. The job of academics, he says, is "to describe and prescribe, and to show how the descriptions we give support the prescriptions we propose." In a moment of humility, he concedes that such work is "not a manual of how to play the game or a prediction of the particular outcomes that will follow once the rules of the game have been redefined." Managers, by contrast, have the "task" of finding the "wisdom and courage to know when and how to change doing business."

This modesty, however, should not be taken seriously. Epstein gives away the game when he concludes that the "comparative advantage of the academic perch is its ability to describe the global consequences that will follow from the rules of the game," forecasting that arises "largely [from] abstract knowledge of how incentives shape the conduct of individuals who are primarily but not exclusively interested in advancing their own self-interest." Financial incentives are not simply one element in explaining human behavior; They are practically the whole story, but one that can be told "abstractly."

Alas, Epstein believes one can understand social systems through deductive reason, abstractly tracing out what "will" happen from what the "incentives" tell you. He would have a hard time understanding why every other industrial democracy decided long ago that medical care should be allocated differently from "vacation homes and fast cars." Nor would he find it easy to comprehend—except with the assertion of false consciousness—why other democracies are completely uninterested in any of his prescriptions.

This is a shame since Epstein has, on some subjects, perfectly sensible things to say. He discusses Oregon's health care rationing plan with clarity, properly showing that all medical systems ration in one way or another and that a society cannot give every patient what he wants whenever he wants it. Epstein recognizes the political dynamics that condition our treatment of

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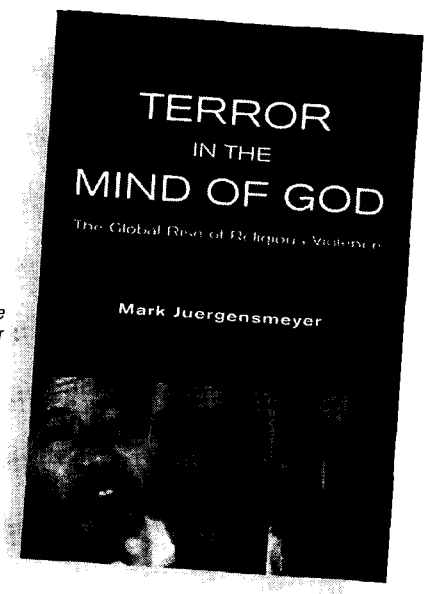

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Medicare and understandably concludes that making medical care a right will further solidify such programs. And, in fairness, Epstein acknowledges the cost-containing potential of global budgets but rightly notes that they "work only as well as the political system that lies behind them." One could go on with examples of individual claims—or topical discussions—which reveal the clarity with which Richard Epstein can discuss issues. The trouble is that this would be like panning for gold in what is, indisputably, a pile of pro-market rocks.

THEODORE MARMOR *teaches politics and public policy in Yale University's management and law schools. His most recent book is* The Politics of Medicare, Second Edition.

Owning Nothing

By Joshua Rosenblum

ACCORDING TO JEREMY RIFKIN, a peculiar shift, notable especially in the last decade, has taken place in the way that businesses and consumers view physical property and the exchange of goods. "[P]hysical property," he writes, "is going to steadily migrate from the assets side of the ledger to the expense column... while intangible forms of capital will increasingly find their way onto the assets page." Physical goods have always served as "containers" for services. For example, a CD has no intrinsic value, only the value of delivering music to your ears. In the age of downloadable music, though, the CD loses its value as a container for music. This trend towards sacrificing ownership of containers for access to their contents, and the undesirable personal and social consequences, form the heart of Rifkin's arguments.

AGE OF ACCESS:
How the Shift from Ownership to Access is Transforming Capitalism
by Jeremy Rifkin
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The central reasons he identifies for this change are an increasing pace of technological innovation and a consuming public sated with physical goods. The speed of technological change means that, whether you're a consumer or a business, there is a great risk that your property will become obsolete before you have a chance to break even on what you paid for it. Why plunk down thousands of dollars for a computer today when you know it'll be half the price or even free in six months?

The second reason is closely tied to the answer to "what do you buy the person who has everything?" in an age when (at least in the most affluent countries) many people have close to everything they need. When even the simplest goods provide much of everything a consumer could want from a utilitarian perspective, what people buy more and more are "lifestyles" or culture. While an Acura may be a fine car, mechanically, it differs little from the Honda on which it is based—in fact, you may be surprised by the name that's stamped on many of the parts under the hood. What consumers are chasing more and more when they buy luxury is not physical comfort, but access to a way of life.

Rifkin argues that, unchecked, these trends lead to a world where the cultural sphere is strip-mined for experiences. Commercialized networks of access then process these experiences and deliver them to captive consumers who companies have spent years profiling and prodding. The results, in Rifkin's mind: millennia-old cultures destroyed and the emergence of a society where empathy and compassion find themselves deadened because sanitized, commercial, paid-for experiences have replaced human interactions.

Rifkin's conclusion is a call to redistance the cultural sphere from the commercial and to fight against a world where access is always negotiable and controlled by a small group of multinational corporations. But nobody forced consumers and businesses to live in this world where constant change and technical innovation make property a liability rather than an asset. Individuals and corporations looked at the costs and benefits of upgrading to the latest and greatest technology and (eventually) made the decision that the benefits won out. Did they make the right decision? Rifkin would presumably say no, based on the social and psychological implications, but it is hard to argue against a decision that will soon place the power of a 1980 supercomputer in your palm and, with it, instant, virtually free connections to family and friends around the world. In fact, because access-providing companies are more interested in a long-term relationship with you, they may well treat you better than if you had just bought their product.

Rifkin has written a thought-provoking book that is well worth reading. But owning nothing really might not be such a bad thing.

JOSHUA ROSENBLUM *creates software and is a freelance writer in Silicon Valley.*

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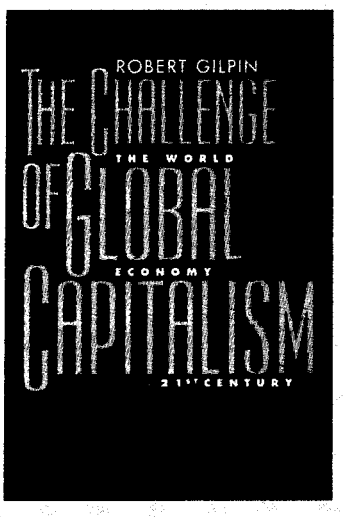

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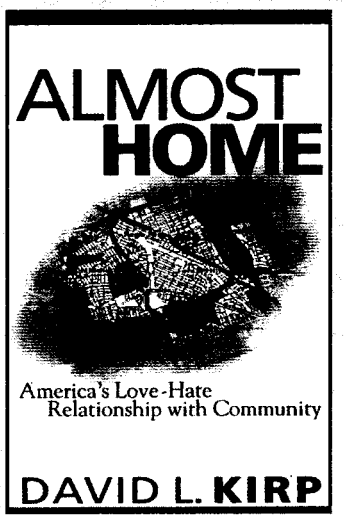

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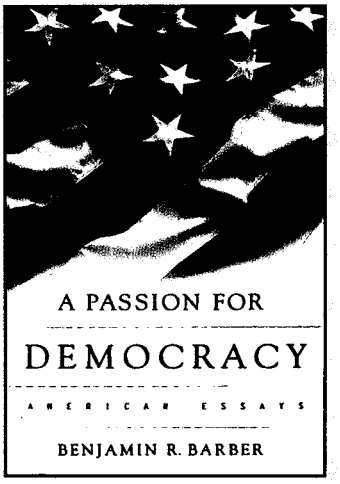

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